AFRICANUS JOURNAL

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Contents

Current Books from professors and students of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston Campus (Center for Urban Ministerial Education) are interspersed throughout the Journal.

Goals of the *Africanus Journal*

The *Africanus Journal* is an academic, multilingual journal. Its goals are to promote:

a. the mission and work of the members and mentors of the Africanus Guild Ph.D. Research Program of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, based on the Boston campus (the Center for Urban Ministerial Education [CUME]).

b. the principles of the Africanus Guild (evangelical orthodox Christian men and women who are multicultural, multiracial, urban-oriented, studying a Bible without error in a cooperative way).

Scholarly papers may be submitted normally by those who are in a Th.M., D.Min., Ph.D. program or have a Th.M., D.Min., Ph.D., Ed.D., or equivalent degree.

http://www.gordonconwell.edu/boston/africanusjournal

Mentoring Scholars in a New Millennium

THE JULIUS AFRICANUS GUILD

was created at the Boston campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with the purpose of identifying and nurturing evangelical minority doctoral students with the potential to impact the global Body of Christ significantly through their scholarship.

The Guild exists as a Ph.D. research support and mentoring program in collaboration with schools such as London School of Theology in England. The context of the Guild is urban and multicultural with an emphasis on developing scholars who can address difficult issues facing the church today with a commitment to the inerrency of Scriptures and the contextual application of the principles found therein.

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Life of Julius Africanus

Julius Africanus was probably born in Jerusalem, many scholars think around A.D. 200. Africanus was considered by the ancients as a man of consummate learning and sharpest judgment (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 6:128). He was a pupil of Heracles, distinguished for philosophy and other Greek learning, in Alexandria, Egypt around A.D. 231–233. In A.D. 220/226, he performed some duty in behalf of Nicopolis (formerly Emmaus) in Palestine. Later he likely became bishop of Emmaus (Eusebius, *History*, VI.xxxi.2). Origen calls him "a beloved brother in God the Father, through Jesus Christ, His holy Child" (*Letter from Origen to Africanus* 1). Fellow historian Eusebius distinguishes him as "no ordinary historian" (*History,* I. vi.2). Eusebius describes the five books of *Chronologies* as a "monument of labor and accuracy" and cites extensively from his harmony of the evangelists' genealogies (*History,* VI. xxxi. 1–3). Africanus was a careful historian who sought to defend the truth of the Bible. He is an ancient example of meticulous, detailed scholarship which is historical, biblical, truthful, and devout.

Even though Eusebius describes Africanus as the author of the *Kestoi*, Jerome makes no mention of this (*ANF* 6:124). The author of *Kestoi* is surnamed Sextus, probably a Libyan philosopher who arranged a library in the Pantheon at Rome for the Emperor. The *Kestoi* was probably written toward the end of the 200s. It was not written by a Christian since it contains magical incantations (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* III.412).

The Greek text of Africanus' writings may be found in Martinus Josephus Routh, *Reliquiae sacrae* II (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974 [1846]), 225–309, and Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, Karl Pinggéra, eds., William Adler, trans., *Iulius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments*, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schrifsteller* 15 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

The extant writings of Julius Africanus may be found in vol. 1, no 1, April 2009 edition of the *Africanus Journal*.

Other Front Matter

Editorial team
Quonekuia Day, Benjamin Fung, Gustavo Karakey, John Lathrop, Deb Beatty Mel, Alvin Padilla, Nicole Rim, John Runyon, Aída Besançon Spencer, William David Spencer

Summary of Content
This issue examines the present as it affects the future of the Christian community, opening with two addresses envisioning a truly multi-cultural theological education, followed by an examination of our need for a cybersex ethic, a reevaluation of our attitude toward the poor, and a consideration of human suffering and God's goodness in a global context. Finally, the issue concludes with several helpful book reviews.

A New Kind of Theological School:
Contextualized Theological Education Models[1]

Alvin Padilla

Have we structured our system of theological education in such a way that best serves our aspirations? Do the current institutional arrangements (systemic structures) help or hinder us to flourish in the 21st century world? Keep that set of questions in mind as we proceed, for we shall return to them at the conclusion. As to a brief, one paragraph glance at our past, I would like us to abandon the idea that theological education in North America hitherto had not had to deal with transformative change. In the middle decades of the 18th century, the North American colonies found themselves in a wave of religious excitement that came to be known as the Great Awakening. That religious movement represented a watershed moment in the eventual birth of the USA as it not only created a self-identity as a unique people of God in the colonists' mindset, but it also marked the transition from medieval to modern in North American Christianity. In the Great Awakening and its aftermath, we witness the collapse of the traditional pattern of parish life as it was then understood: "The lines of ecclesiastical authority, the purity of Episcopal instruction, the stability of apostolic succession—these and much else besides were shattered in the Great Awakening."[2]

The challenges for the church then were not too dissimilar to our own challenges. Two of the notable names of the 18th century clearly express the educational challenges that they faced. Gilbert Tennent in a much quoted sermon ("The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry") argued that "if a minister is himself spiritually undernourished, it is not likely that he can offer real sustenance" to another in need of spiritual direction.   John Hancock, father of the famous signer of the Declaration of Independence, adds no apprehension about ministry without brains, or, as he puts it, "prostituting the Holy Ministry by opening a wide door of entrance to every bold intruder."[3] If I were to transport the gist of their concerns to our context, I would imagine that the former might sponsor tremendous growth and expansion of Christianity in "unlikely" places as an opportunity for the overlooked to lead the rest of us, while the other might emphasize a more "traditional" mode of empowering people for leadership in the church.

Most of us here today, I believe would agree that the institutions that have been established to provide theological education in North America are in the midst of tremendous changes. Early in this 21st century, the Christian Church finds herself in a challenging position as we confront the multicultural, postmodern and pluralistic world in which we have been called to bear witness to Christ. At best we are perplexed and bewildered, not knowing what in the world God is doing through us. At worst, some of us claim the death of the church and even Christianity itself— ignoring the tremendous growth of Christianity in cities like Boston. Still others see the next wave of Christianity emerging over the southern horizon and long for the arrival of its powerful undertow on our very shores so that it may take hold of the North American church and sweep it under its power.

Indeed, the whole world has come to our doorstep. Learning to live well in the diverse culture of North America is no longer an option, but a necessity. The U.S. Census estimates that in 2050 the proportion of whites in the population will be only 53%. Our children will live and serve in a

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society in which their classmates, neighbors and fellow disciples of Christ will be equally divided between whites and people of color. As new people move into our cities and local communities, the communities undoubtedly will change. The changes could be haphazard and filled with misunderstandings, hurt feelings and even violence, or the changes could permit all to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves for the better.

Although the West [North America, Europe] has indeed lost its numerical superiority, it still retains an iron grip on the reins of power in the church. We in the West assume that we speak ex cathedra for all of Christendom. It is our theology that is normative. We believe our way of being the church is the standard for all to follow. In the area of theological education, we continue to assume that western educational methods work best for everyone. We have not dared to envision new ways of learning to serve the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity overwhelming our society—we are unwilling to reinvent ourselves.

The fact that we are in the middle of tumultuous change is only half of the challenge we face. I am sure that you, as I do, affirm that the end goal of our theological education programs is the future leadership of the church. Preparing tomorrow's leaders today has become a catch phrase in many seminaries. However, though we may say that we are educating the future leaders of the church the reality is that church leadership is changing far more rapidly in the local church than in our theological schools. Leadership is like fishing. Successful anglers are adaptable, constantly reading the water to discover the best place to cast their line. They learn to think like a fish. In their attempt to outsmart the slippery fin, frequently they approach the water slowly, keeping a low profile. Effective leaders constantly read the cultural stream. They continually study social, cultural and organizational trends that are like currents in a stream. They get a sense of what will likely happen as a result of those trends. Thus, they are better prepared to face today and tomorrow. Churches are confronting issues and needs that we in seminary give no consideration to. We do a much better job at keeping pace with the changing face of theological scholarship—Jesus research for example—than with the rapid change of congregational leadership.

It should be noted, for example, that current practices in American seminaries reveal that theological schools remain enamored with pedagogical systems that are dated and increasingly irrelevant to our communities and are disconnected from both global and local realities. They fail to incorporate Hispanics, Blacks and others in leadership roles at all levels of the school's structure and neglect paying attention to issues of particular relevance to Ethnic Americans, such as immigration reform, healthcare, education, urban violence, youth at risk, etc. There are many challenges facing theological schools in the 21st century and the challenge of dealing well with the different histories, worldviews, languages, dialects and cultures is the most significant and most overwhelming.

While Christianity in North America continues its slow progress toward the creation of a multiethnic church, seminaries for the most part are mired in monoculturalism. Yes, there are mission statements indicating the school's commitment to ethnic diversity and its desire to attract non-White students. However, these statements are rarely accompanied by a significant multi-ethnic presence among the faculty and senior administrators. Recently, I spoke with a colleague from another seminary in the midst of searching for its chief executive. A comment he made surprised me. He commented that the majority culture finds it difficult to follow someone who is non-White or has a notable foreign accent. With opinions and comments like that, no wonder seminaries lack ethnics among their senior leadership. What my colleague demonstrated with that comment is his school's lack of intentionality in its pursuit of ethnic diversity—though its mission statement clearly indicated their welcoming stance of the stranger. Lacking intentionality, schools find reasons to rationalize the continuation of past hiring practices. The challenge to diversify staff and faculty is endemic to Christianity because of our commitment [in principle] to the equality of all—Christian institutions must diversify or risk making a mockery of our belief that all men and women are made in the image of God.

Indeed, God is performing a transformation in the Church, a transformation that is reshaping the very core of what the church is—how we are structured, when we meet to worship, how we worship, in what language, with what instrumentation, and that women and men from diverse backgrounds and perspectives are teaching us. It is transforming how we envision and deliver theological education. It is a lot like curricular review—we may be attracted to its promise of a more transformative educational experience for our students, but we all fear, nay hate, the process of getting there. Transformation is a wonderful thing; it is the process of changing from one state to another. However, if you do not like change, transformation can be a very troubling thing. If you do not like uncertainty nor unpredictability, then transformation is indeed a daunting thing, a very painful process—but the end results are well worth it.

If we were to take seriously the vision of Revelation 7:9, then we would understand that becoming a multicultural church or seminary is not a condescension of the white dominant culture to facilitate educational efforts among ethnic minorities around it. Rather, it is the elevation of every one of us, including the white dominant culture, into something far greater, far more marvelous and wonderful—the people of God.

Why this fear of truly embracing a multicultural future? Seeing our cultural perspective as the norm, we view others as divergent and devalue their contribution to our lives, to our churches and to our educational institutions. We value them as definitely less than we are, and we do a great thing to humble ourselves for their sake. That is the attitude in far too many of our educational institutions. We can only think of how we can help minorities rather than how they could invigorate our academic institutions. In dire need of new members and students, they would be welcomed into our hallowed halls and sanctuaries—as long as they conform to our norms, as long as they become just like us in every shape and form. It is sad to say that some theological educators see ventures into ethnic America (African Americans, Hispanics, Korean Americans, etc) as an accommodation that waters down educational quality. Rarely, do we see the value and expertise that they can contribute to the attainment of our missional aspirations.

As we take note of the diversity among us, we marvel at what God is doing, and in the process disclose our ignorance of early Christianity. Take a quick glance at the original New Testament story of the early Christian movement: how the slaves, the disenfranchised, the low merchants, the widows, the unemployed, the immigrants, and the socially downcast found a new and exciting alternative to social life that that world had not imagined possible. In this new community, everyone was accepted with reverence and respect. For the early Christians understood that the Lord Himself had emptied himself of all social status for their sake; then shouldn't they do the same for each other?

Consider the *originality of the Christian movement:* everyone had a new family name, "Christian," a third race, a new common bloodstream, the blood of Christ! This new reality was created not by transforming the basic nationality of each person, but by transforming the limitations of national identities inherent in each person. The early Christians were considered atheists by others because they refused to recognize the national gods of any particular nation while accepting the One God of all humanity.

Having taken a brief look at this original Christianity, doesn't it seem strange that we in North America see multiculturalism as something new? And there lies the gist of our problem. We as a society envision a multicolor institution rather than a truly multicultural one. Let me explain what I mean: We are concerned primarily with the numerical make up of the ethno-cultural compositions of our institutions. I agree that numerical representation is important—but we must go beyond that for numbers are but one of the factors that determines what is a multicultural community. And it is not the most significant factor.

We must consider how each of the ethnic groups *are* represented and involved in the life of the seminary. Does the organization/structure of the school involve or allow for their experiences and faith traditions to influence how we carry out our mission? It may be that structural change will have to represent the cultural mix of that congregation, but this cannot be done without a clear understanding that the Bible provides the necessary tension for that formulation.

This aspect of multiculturalism also has to do with matters of reconciliation and justice. Gaede states in his *When Tolerance Is No Virtue*: "Multiculturalism also carries much baggage that ought to worry Christians. This baggage has less to do with the details of multiculturalism than with its general orientation. And perhaps the best way to get at this is to notice that, more and more, those who favor multiculturalism argue not on the basis of a desire for justice, but on the basis of multiculturalism's practical necessity or its validity as a general worldview."[4]   In other words, we want the numerical numbers without the transformative commitment. The goal here is simply cooperation, good relations, harmony and agreement. And it thereby undermines and displaces the true ends of human existence. Presence of the multiethnic community in our seminaries is a given, if mission is applied, when students, faculty, staff and administrators of color are discipled and become responsible members in that community of learners. It is a state of incompleteness when the church neglects to train and incorporate believers into the fullness of the ministry.

In a true Multi-Cultural Ethnic Community (MEC), as women and men from other cultures and ethnic groups are incorporated into leadership roles, the structure of the institution, of the community of faith itself, is reshaped [reformed if you will] in order to allow for a smoother transition and in response to the inner workings of the Spirit in the community. Conversely, if you do have some participation of ethnic persons in your community of faith, but it has not structurally changed the institution, then what you have is assimilation and not a true multicultural community. Referring to the tragedy of assimilation, Hispanic educator Arturo Madrid states, "Diversity is desirable only in principle, not in practice. Long live diversity—as long as it conforms to my standards, to my mind set, to my view of life, to my sense of order." Not only is there structural change, there is also change in purpose, in mission and of course in the overarching vision of the ministry. As we are transformed into a godly MEC, we incorporate the issues and concerns affecting the lives of everyone in the community and we allow the other to lead us in this transformational journey. "Multiculturalism is not simply the coloring of the water with a sprinkling of different people. It demands a willingness to define communal norms more broadly than one standard for all. Intersections of race, class or gender, and other diverse facets of human existence must be considered in all circumstances. Culture is defined by more than race, class or gender alone. Authentic Christian multiculturalism proactively encourages persons to affirm their culture within the context of a Bible-centered, theologically constructed and communally nurturing group that shares power as an innate aspect of their inclusive witness."[5]

Therefore, the challenge before us, as we seek to become truly multicultural Christian institutions, is how we become really multicultural without the trappings of a merely quantitative approach—interested only in numbers and balanced budgets—how we can reach a level of interaction and personal engagement wherein everyone feels welcomed and affirmed. Christian ministry [service, really] is at its core interacting with all kinds of people in ways that give them glimpses of Jesus in us. In Christianity we affirm the value of each person, indeed we claim that before God we are all the same, we are equal regardless of ethnicity, culture or language.

In empowering others for Christian service, the problem for educational institutions, and the church, is multilayered. How do we prepare our students and would- be disciples to live in

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4 S. D. Gaede, *When Tolerance Is No Virtue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993).

5 J. Herbert Nelson II, *Occasional Paper: Overcoming the Presbyterian Power Trap: Toward and Authentic Multicultural Witness in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).* http://www.pcusa.org/resource/occasional-paper-overcoming-presbyterian-power-tra/, accessed 12/01/2010.

a multicultural, multiethnic world that is largely freed from racism? The word "prepare" in the above sentence suggests an educational process. One of the key objectives of educational institutions is the reshaping of life in relation to human purpose. For theological schools, this implies that we must seek to reshape our students to enable them to live well in a multicultural world. The work of the Church is expressed through *koinonia* (community and communion), *diakonia* (service and outreach), *kerygma* (proclaiming the Word of God) and *didache* (teaching and learning). To foster an environment of multiculturalism within its institutional ethos, theological schools must create a climate that embraces this work of the church.

How can we foster such a process in our educational institutions so laden with traditional structures that resist change to the core in order to enable them to become multicultural communities? The process of developing a curriculum that fosters multiculturalism begins when members of the institution come together to discuss issues relevant to multicultural communities. This is *koinonia*. The school's leadership drafts and develops an intentionally anti-racist, pro-multiethnic statement to be adhered to by all. This is *kerygma*. This intentionality must be accompanied by practices that promote multiculturalism [*diakonia*] and a discussion of strategies, policies, legislation needed to further promote multiculturalism [*didache*].

How can the church respond to and minister positively in a changing world? What is ministry in a changing church? How do we effectively prepare women and men for leadership in this changing church?

We need to ask these questions for there has been a blurring of the definition of theological education. "Some of this has been intentional: 'theological education' no longer refers to seminary education alone, but to efforts on the part of the whole church to learn from its rich traditions. With many different locations and agendas now associated with theological education, it is natural for some blurring to occur."[6] The changing demographics of Christianity [the church in the global south] suggests that there is systemic change within the church itself, and, therefore, the educational institutions that serve it. Since one distinctive and enduring characteristic of theological education is that it serves the mission and ministry of the church, fundamental change appears to be on its way. The result will probably mean more than just a change in delivery systems but rather fundamental changes are envisioned.

Rev. Dr. Alvin Padilla is Dean of the Boston campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (CUME), Dean of Hispanic Initiatives, and Associate Professor of New Testament. He has recently published *Lucas* in the Conozca su Biblia series (Augsburg Fortress) as well as many other books and articles.

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6 Donn Morgan, "As Through a Glass Darkly: Defining Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century" *Anglican Theological Review* 90:2 (Spring 2008).

Where Should We Go From Here? Charting the Future of the Seminary in the Best and Worst of Times[1]

Frank A. James III

It has been for me a good first year as Provost. Even though it has only been a year, I feel a very strong sense of calling to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and I have very much enjoyed working with this faculty, with President Dennis Hollinger and the rest of the team. GCTS is a special place.

Yet, I find it a little hard to say "good" when one of our beloved faculty members, Dr. Gary Parrett, is still recovering after a terrible accident in Korea two months ago. On his regular trek to minister in Korea and then Sri Lanka, his bus accidentally overturned, thirteen passengers died and many others were seriously injured, including Dr. Parrett. I find it hard to say "good" when one of our own trustees, David Rogers, is suddenly and unexpectedly with the Lord. One minute he is playing basketball with family members and the next he is gone.

One of the last conversations I had with Gary before he left for Korea was about lamentation. We both felt that lamentation was a neglected part of evangelical worship—it is after all present throughout the Psalms. We do hope and pray for Gary's full recovery but we lament until then.

When David Rogers was here for the board meeting last May, he and I sat together for luncheon, and we had an instant rapport. He shared his broken heart at the loss of his son Josh, and I shared my grief at the loss of my brother Kelly. Heartache has a way of bringing about instant connections.

Some say life is like a roller coaster with some ups and some downs, but I tend to think life is more like the two parallel rails on a railroad track. On one rail things can be really wonderful, but, simultaneously, on the other rail of our lives, there can be great heartache. I think this is what Dickens meant when he wrote *"it was the best of times, it was the worst of times"* in the opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities*. It has been a good year, but it has also been a hard year.

Looking Back

Some of the great things about my first year have been getting to know this faculty. This year has confirmed what I observed about this faculty this time last year: you are passionate about GCTS and passionate about your calling to this place. You are called not just to seminary education in general, but called to Gordon-Conwell seminary education in particular. In meeting after meeting, this came through.

One of the things I found enjoyable were the weekly lunches I had throughout the year. There was no agenda other than getting to know you as sisters and brothers in Christ. I learned about some of your struggles. I learned that some of us struggle with the lingering effects of childhood trauma, some of us struggle with our kids or with ageing parents. And sometimes we struggle with one another.

I learned that this is a mission-driven institution—not a financially-driven school. That is not to suggest that finances are not essential to our work and for our families. I for one am glad for our President and our Vice President for Development (Kurt Drescher) and the rest of the development team. They all deserve our gratitude and thanks—every day! What I mean to suggest is that our mission as an educational institution is why we get out of bed every morning and come to work. There are no clock-in clock-out professors (or staff/administration) at this school.

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1 This essay was presented at the fall faculty retreat of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA (September 1-2, 2010).

In the course of this last year when the economic situation was most gloomy, one of our young faculty members volunteered to take a pay cut. Another time, a senior faculty member publicly requested that the younger faculty members have priority in raises. Yet another faculty member volunteered to teach a class at another campus without compensation. This is commitment of a higher order.

Looking Forward

As we look forward to the upcoming year there are several challenges we have to face head on. These are not merely challenges, they are opportunities for us to live out the Gospel at Gordon-Conwell.

1.   We have to work at developing a multi-campus system that affirms a fundamental unity but respects the diversity of our campuses. Each campus brings something different and vital to the whole. The truth is, each campus needs the other.

2.   The search for new faculty is one of the most important things we do. As we continue our searches—Dean of CUME, Professor of Missions (Hamilton), Professor of Old Testament (Charlotte), and an administrative faculty person (Jacksonville) —we have to hire people who not only have stellar academic credentials, but who sense a particular calling to GCTS to be excellent teachers, committed to the church, who love our students and who have that intangible something called "fit."

3.   We have to work hard to cultivate and attract diverse faculty—diverse ethnically, racially and in terms of gender. We do this not because it is politically correct, but because we need their wisdom, experience and insight so that we can gain a deeper understanding of the Bible, a better understanding of ourselves and can meet the needs of our students. Last May, I heard Soong-Chan Rah, a GCTS grad and current professor at North Park Seminary, speak at the CUME graduation dinner. He blew me away. At first he startled me with his assertion that Evangelicalism needs to be freed from its "white cultural captivity." I went home that night and read his book, *The New Evangelicalism*, cover to cover and I underwent a conversion—Soong-Chan Rah is right, and I realized I needed to hear what he had to say.

4.   We need to review our curriculum. This is not to suggest that our curriculum is bad; it is to suggest that we always need to be reviewing our curriculum. We all hold two foundational theological doctrines in tension—the devastating effects of the Fall and the promise of renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Fall reminds us that we are not perfect and therefore our curriculum is not perfect. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit reminds us that we can do better.

5.   We need to continue to develop our Hispanic Initiative. This is *strategic* because the Hispanic population is on the rise. But even more important, the Hispanic Initiative is *part of our mission* as an institution and as followers of Christ. We must reach out because we love our Hispanic sisters and brothers.

6.   We need to be reminded that all of our academic divisions are vital to the success of the GCTS education. The divisions of Christian Thought and Biblical Studies are an essential part of

our DNA and so is the Ministry division. There must be no divisional step-children at GCTS. We need to cultivate strong inter-connections between the divisions and explore new ways to work together, whether in co-teaching or cross-divisional teaching. I think we all understand that the ability to do exegesis and to think theologically is good, but it is not good enough. We must also maintain a strong emphasis on ministerial skills of preaching, counseling, education, and so on. If pastors cannot preach, then their theology and exegesis remain in the pulpit and never reach the pew.

7.   We need to continue to develop a culture of assessment. In 2015 we are up for renewal with both accrediting agencies: ATS and NEASC. These agencies are not our enemies; they are our friends. Assessment is important because it provides us with data about whether we are accomplishing our mission. Are our students and graduates learning what we are teaching? We have to ask that question for ourselves not just for our accreditors.

8.   I want to encourage innovation and creativity in the classroom. What I mean to suggest that is that we want to grow as teachers. It seems to me that any good teacher understands that she/he has room for improvement. Good teachers want to be great teachers. As funds allow, I want to bring in outside experts to challenge us to think in new ways and to inform us of new technologies.

Let me conclude with one last example to remind us all that these matters I have identified are not merely mundane administrative minutiae. What we do has eternal significance. A few weeks ago it was reported that ten Christian aid workers were massacred in Afghanistan by the Taliban. The ten worked with the International Assistance Mission and had just returned from Nurestan to bring medical help to that remote region in Afghanistan. The team leader, Dr. Tom Little, an optometrist, had done this type of medical aid work in Afghanistan for more than 30 years. He was also a former student at GCTS. He is not the first GCTS student to die a martyr's death, but his loss is a painful reminder that we are preparing students who are engaged in a life and death ministry. Dr. Little's sacrifice in Afghanistan is a source of honor for GCTS, but it is also cause for much grief. Our joy is mixed with sadness. As I said, life in a fallen world juxtaposes the best and worst.

It has been an enormous privilege to be at GCTS this past year. I pray that the Lord will give us many years together as we march into the future and train women and men to serve Him in advancing the kingdom.

Frank A. James III is Provost and Professor of Historical Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. Most recently he served as the third President of Reformed Theological Seminary Orlando (2004-2009). He has two doctorates, a D.Phil. in History from Oxford University and a Ph.D. in Theology from Westminster Theological Seminary/Pennsylvania. He has written or edited 8 books on church history and published over 50 articles in popular and academic journals and has given lectures at distinguished universities around the globe including Oxford University, University of Zurich and the University of Padua in Italy. He gave the Beeson Divinity Lectures at Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in 2006.

Preparing Urban Scholar Practitioners

THEO WILLIAMS

Theo Williams grew up playing basketball, dreaming he'd play professionally someday. But as Theo entered college, God used a series of injuries to change his priorities. He began to coach, using basketball to reach inner city youth for Jesus Christ.

Theo enrolled in the Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME), the Boston campus of Gordon-Conwell. While at CUME, Theo co-founded and served as president of Antioch, Inc., a nonprofit committed to reconciliation, assisted in the planting of a church and honed his poetry skills. Upon graduating in 2004 with a Master of Arts in Urban Ministry, Theo and his wife Nicole spent a year in Jamaica mentoring youth through sports and music.

Theo currently works at Bethel College in Mishawaka, Indiana, as Associate Professor of Communication, as well as the Faculty Coordinator for the Center for Intercultural Development. Whether teaching speech, conducting multicultural youth ministry, recording a spoken-word album, or starting a new church, Theo is integrating what he learned in the classroom and through his experiences at CUME.

"I began to see how basketball could be a part of lifelong ministry, and I realized I needed further preparation to give me a theological foundation as well as a hands-on training. Above all, I wanted a seminary committed to inner-city ministry."

—Theo Williams

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Cyber Marriage, Virtual Adultery, Real Consequences, and the Need for a Techno Sexual Ethic[1]

William David Spencer

Introduction

Divorce is, sadly, a common, global, human occurrence. Adultery, abandonment, abuse are among the heartbreaking causes that rend apart the one-flesh marital relationship God intended from the beginning of time (see Genesis 2:24). Against such serious reasons as these, divorce on the grounds that a cartoon representative of oneself has had virtual sex with the cartoon representative of another individual initially sounds ludicrous, until one discovers the amount of heartache and alienation and devastation such an incident causes, for, as a matter of fact, a growing number of divorces naming internet activities as the reason have been challenging the notion of harmless play in regard to involvement in simulator dating games and on-line relationships through avatars. Virtual non-marital sexual unions and even avatar marriages and adulteries with on-line characters driven by other real life game players on simulated parallel universe sites like "Second Life" and the lure of interactive games like "Love Plus" have sufficiently blurred the distinction between reality and fantasy to culminate in the recent, well-publicized, and actual marriage of a 27 year old Japanese man to a character in a Nintendo dating simulator game, raising serious ethical questions that affect both present and future generations of Christians. The casual response of a young Japanese wife to her husband's confession of infatuation with a virtual girlfriend, "If he's just enjoying it as a game, that's fine with me," is insufficient for Christian spouses, parents, pastors, educators, reminding us of the power of the metaphorical biblical equation of "apostasy parallels adultery" and suggesting that, if a conscious ethic is not applied consistently by Christians to our activities in the cyber world, all relationships within the faith, including the crucial relationship of "church as bride" with "the bridegroom Christ" will be lethally undermined.

Cybersex: Not of This World, But Very Much of It …

Though several companies have launched virtual worlds, the main arena in which digital sexual relationships take place is Second Life, a virtual world inspired by an ingenious, fictional, metaverse where characters as game players project a digital representation of themselves into a three-dimensional virtual world and interact with each other in Neal Stephenson's 1992 novel *Snow Crash*.[2] Making that concept a virtual reality, Philip Rosedale, founder and chairman of the board, and his colleagues at Linden Lab began developing Linden World, before moving it to Beta as Second Life in 2003. Millions of participants are now involved in its social networking, which seems to be the core appeal of Second Life. Many welcome it as a second chance at life, wherein one can create for oneself an animated replica that represents the way that one wishes

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1 Please note: all punctuating from quotations is maintained from original sources. This article was presented as a paper to the Evangelical Theological Society in November 18, 2010, in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. For those who are interested, a separate paper linking digital adultery and robotics, which I presented on June 23, 2010, at the 3rd International Conference on Human-Robot Personal Relationships at Leiden University (Netherlands), is being published in the proceedings of the HRPR2010 conference in the Springer LNICST series (Lecture Notes of the Institute for Computer Sciences, Social Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering) as well as made available in their SpringerLink online publication database.

2 Wagner James Au, "Snowcrashed," http://nwn.blogs.com/photos/uncatergorized/snowcrash_display/jpg, accessed 2/16/2010, 7-9. Neal Stephenson's novel is currently available in paperback from Bantam Spectra Books. Recently, Linden Labs commissioned Fisik Baskerville to design a virtual monument to the novel and its author and place 200 of these in various locations in the landscape. Most of us think immediately of the Matrix movies, while the more initiated may reference the earlier 1981 novella, Vernor Vinge's *True Names*, or the earlier parallel worlds in Lovecraft, the Pulps, or the realms of the gods in mythology.

one could be. Men can be always aged 20, tall, muscular, dark, mysterious, handsome, armed with a swash-buckling sword. Women can return to and remain at age 18, perfectly proportioned, naturally blonde, enchanting though intelligent, while aggressive yet winsome, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. Through these avatars interacting and forming relationships, the lonely, the frustrated, the bored, can, in simulation, date, couple up, marry, and have virtual sexual relationships, that may be in a digital world, but whose impact may spill over to the real world.

Public attention was captured by a BBC video that has played to thousands on You-tube, and global newspaper and internet attention, which has publicized a series of lawsuits around the world from the fall-out of a variety of cybersex activities, from viewing pornography on-line, to participating in sexually oriented computer games, to establishing liaisons in virtual chat-rooms, to marrying digital characters both human and machine driven. Here are examples of each of these:

In Romania, a woman sued for divorce, telling the judge that, although hers "was a good husband, coming home on time and taking care of the family," "she couldn't accept being replaced by 'virtual lovers,'" having "caught him watching porn movies and looking to pictures of naked women," which, she reported, was "totally away from my principles of life."[3]

In Israel, a controversy arose about "whether a woman can divorce her husband because he committed virtual adultery using a virtual reality entertainment that is readily available over the Global Landscape," when a wife sued her husband for divorce for playing, among others, a computer game called "King of Israel," that allows one to relive episodes in King David's life, including committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah. She charged, "Insofar as the psychological damage that has been done to me…there is no difference between virtual adultery and the real thing." Her husband, the proprietor of a religious book store, defended himself, "Now, in reliving the life of King David, I am not actually committing adultery, nor am I actually plotting anyone's murder. So, I do not see how my virtual sins, can be compared in nature even to the actual sins of the historic King David, who is considered one of the great Jewish heroes of all time." Israel's Chief Rabbi, Aaron Levinsky, responded, "King David was a righteous man who repented of his sins. If Mr. Cohen wants to relive the experience of King David he should repent of his sins, abandon these silly entertainments, and devote more time to the study of Torah and religion. I would find Mr. Cohen's argument more convincing if he could compose a virtual Book of Psalms." Complicating the issue, however, is a ruling the court made in favor of Negev Virtual Entertainments' forbidden foods software, which has users eat something bland as it simulates in the brain the "taste, texture, and smell" of pork, lobster, and shrimp. The Chief Rabbi explained by NewsNet teleconference that the point "at issue is whether virtual murder, virtual theft, virtual sins of every kind are of the same nature as actual murder, theft and sin," adding, "I know that Christians, Moslems, and others are wrestling with these same issues." Princeton Seminary's Sam Humble, in a friend-of-the-court response, replied, "Christ established a new standard, to the effect that hatred in the heart was akin to actual murder. Lust in the heart was akin to actual adultery. On that basis, I believe that these new entertainments are sinful because they promote the inclination of the heart to sin. They promote lust and violence. Thus, I believe that virtual sin is sin." While Rhoda Baker of the American Civil Liberties Union countered by citing a Stanford University study that "indicates…committing a virtual murder makes a person less prone to violence," being "a healthy outlet for violent urges," Jewish Theological Seminary (NY) theologian Gordon Weiss agreed with Rev. Humble and not the ACLU, "Clearly Mrs. Cohen should be granted a divorce on the grounds that her husband is involved in pornography, which is immoral."[4]

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3 Reported in the Romanian 7 *Plus* newspaper, according to Ananova, "Wife Wants Divorce for Virtual Adultery," http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_1622198.html, accessed 2/12/2010, 1.

4 Yosef Aharoni, "Quandary in Israel: Rabbinical Court Debates Status of 'Virtual Sin' in Jewish Law," *The Sentinel-Observer*, http://www.cs.wcupa.edu/epstein/rabbinic.htm, 2. Reports of a number of cases of pornography use being presented as legal grounds for divorce all over the world are available, some as the high-profile case of Christie Brinkley's divorce from Peter Cook because of his $3000 a month internet addiction to pornographic websites and posting naked

In Australia, the on-line *Family Relationships Magazine* reports, "New university research shows as many as 50 per cent of people dabbling in online romances are already in relationships and many are having multiple affairs." Eric Hudson, manager for western Sydney's "counseling network Relationships Australia," observes, "It's happening more and more often."[5]

In the United States, the Hoogestraat family of Arizona came under public scrutiny when the 53 year old husband, recovering both from the grief of his mother dying of cancer and from health issues due to diabetes and gall bladder problems, created a new career for himself in the cyberworld, using his skill in computer graphics to start several profitable virtual businesses and even hire 25 other people's avatars to work in these businesses. The fall-out was that he was investing 14 hours a day in this virtual world, ignoring his real world wife of seven months, and then marrying a virtual wife, the avatar of a 38 year old Canadian woman. "It's really devastating," mourned his real world wife. "You try to talk to someone or bring them a drink, and they'll be having sex with a cartoon…It's sad; it's a waste of human life…Everybody has their hobbies, but when it's from six in the morning until two in the morning, that's not a hobby, that's your life." Though her adult children are urging their mother to leave, believing, as her daughter concludes, "It's avalanched beyond repair," she maintains, "I'm not a monster; I can see how it fulfills parts of his life that he can no longer do because of physical limitations, because of his age. His avatar, it's him at 25…He's a good person. He's just fallen down a rabbit hole." But her life is lonely: "Basically, the other person is widowed…This other life is so wonderful; it's better than real life. Nobody gets fat, nobody gets gray. The person that's left can't compete with that."   The *Wall Street Journal* commissioned reporter Alexandra Alter to interview several legal consultants, including DePaul University College of Law Professor Jeff Atkinson, who wrote the American Bar Association's *Guide to Marriage, Divorce and Families*, to gauge the impact on United States law. She discovered:

> Family-law experts and marital counselors say they're seeing a growing number of marriages dissolve over virtual infidelity. Cyber affairs don't legally count as adultery unless they cross over into the real world, but they may be cited as grounds for divorce and could be a factor in determining alimony and child custody in some states.[6]

In Great Britain, a disabled woman who had met and married a disabled man virtually on Second Life and then actually in real life, sued successfully for divorce "under the basis of 'unreasonable behavior,'" after "her lawyer told her that other marriages have also ended over 'Second Life' adultery." Her complaint was, "He never did anything in real life," but in Second Life he was having virtual "sex with another player's avatar" as well as "a virtual prostitute," both of which she "forgave," but "then found him committing virtual adultery again."[7]

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pictures of himself on the internet, see Ross Douthat's "Is Pornography Adultery" http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200810/adultery-porn, accessed 2/12/2010, 1.

5 Andy Merrett, "Internet is undermining marriage," *Family Relationships Magazine,* May 28, 2006, http://familyrelationships.org.uk/internet-is-undermining-marriage, accessed 2/12/2010, 1.

6 Alexandra Alter, "Is This Man Cheating On His Wife?" Aug. 10, 2007, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1188670164592393622.html, accessed 2/11/2010, 1,4-7.

7 Josh Pothen, "Virtual Reality? Speculation on Sex, Divorce and Cyberspace," *The Cornell Daily Sun Online*, Dec. 2, 2008, http://cornellsun.com/node/33953, accessed 2/12/2010, 1-2. Numerous responses to such news items and lawsuits have flooded the internet from a variety of quarters. Wagner James Au, a former employee of Linden Labs and an expert on Second Life, questions the plentitude of virtual adulteries since the same cases are mentioned repeatedly ("If Virtual Adultery Is So Common, Why Does the Media Keep Rehashing the Same Virtual Adultery Stories?" http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2009/02/if-virtual-adultery-is-so-common.html, accessed 2/12/2010), 9, adding his own report on "Sex and Romance" to his New World Notes blog. He cites the "exhaustive" tracking of Tyche Shepherd, a Second Life "Resident," who notes that "only 6% of SL land is 'adult' rated for pornographic content." Though dialog boxes rating an area now appear when one is approaching an x-rated region, still he observes, "*Entering* the Adult region, however, is easy enough: You just select Change Preference, and assuming you have a credit card or other payment form registered with the Lindens, you can fly right in. It's actually about as seamless an experience as you'd experience on the web, when you come across a site with adult content." He also notes communities exist, like the 50,000 member one based around the bondage/dominance/sado-

A study of 2,600 responders to an on-line survey concluded "seven out of ten Brits don't believe there's anything wrong in flirting with people online." All responders "said they had a spouse or full-time partner," yet "the same number of men and women answered the question 'Would you consider flirting online as cheating?' with a resounding 'No!'"[8] *Family Relationships Magazine*, which covered that story, counseled, "Get that computer out of our bed!" It cited one such British couple, in which the wife awoke in the middle of the night to find her husband "having virtual sex with another man on his laptop while he was in bed with her." While her husband claimed it was simply an "escape" for him, "My avatar was just exploring things that I'd never sample – or want to sample – in real life," so "no issue" existed "because it wasn't real life," the devastated wife responded, "As far as I am concerned, having virtual sex with a man is the same as having sex with him in real life."[9]

A Dissociation that Marginalizes Families

Sexologist L.M. Percival in a helpful roundup of expert opinion from the journal *Sexuality*, available on-line from the *Socyberty* website, notes, this is an example of "Dissociation," which "is present when a person engages in secretive or illicit sex on the computer and then goes to bed with the spouse without any dissonance or discomfort. When people are overwhelmed by life experiences, dissociation facilitates alteration in consciousness in which aspects of the self are disconnected. These aspects include behavior, affect, sensation, and knowledge."[10]

So plentiful have become such varieties of cybersex addiction, that the journal, *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity,* published a "special issue," entitled "Cybersex: The Dark Side of the Force," from which some of the information in the previous article appears to have been drawn. It was comprised of several studies of the impact on both the addicted and their spouses. How pernicious is such an addiction? Doctors Maressa Hecht Orzack and Carol Ross of Belmont, Massachusetts' McLean Hospital and Sierra Tucson, Inc. respectively, explain:

> A useful analogy made by many experts in the field is that cybersex is like the crack cocaine of sexual addiction. Following that analogy, as a chemical dependency treatment model is commonly used to treat crack addiction, so a compulsive behavioral model such as a sexual addiction model can be used to treat a cybersex addiction. This is usually a mixture of cognitive behavioral therapy and peer support.[11]

A study by Jennifer P. Schneider and the Arizona Community Physicians uncovered ignorance about the seriousness of a cybersex addiction among pastors and other caretakers. For example, one woman they interviewed reported this instance of bad advice from her pastor:

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masochistic novels of John Norman, "where men are masters and women (mostly) slaves," though Second Life tries to keep character nudity and sexual behavior contained to designated areas by levying "Community Standards penalties" for inappropriate dress or behavior in non x-rated or private regions and has strict policies against what is called "age play" or (simulated pedophilia) involving the threat of expulsion from Second Life (even if the real life participants are consenting adults). For adults who appear in their characters as adults, whether heterosexual or homosexual, meeting, falling in love, having sexual encounters, marrying or not are regarded as private activities of adult-driven avatars and not within the purview of Second Life's moral guardians, much in the same way these activities are considered private matters by governments in real life, though in real life, as we see, courts are now becoming involved in dissolving marriages if spouses are unhappy with such liaisons (see Wagner James Au, "Sex and Romance," http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/sex_andromance/index.html, accessed 2/16/2010, 9-15).

8 Andy Merrett, "Seven out of ten Brits in relationships say online flirting is OK," June 28, 2009, http://familyrelationships.org.uk/seven-out-of-ten-brits-in-relationships-say-online-flirting-is-ok, accessed 2/12/2010, 2.

9 Andy Merrett, "Get that computer out of our bed! Virtual reality drives wedge between couple," Feb. 11, 2009, http://familyrelationships.org.uk/get-that-computer-out-of-our-bed-virtual reality-drives-wedge-be..., accessed 2/12/2010, 1.

10 L.M. Percival, "Virtual Infidelity: Cybersex Addiction," Oct. 15, 2007, http://socyberty.com/sexuality/virtual-infidelity-cybersex-addiction/, accessed 2/12/2010, 2.

11 Maressa Hecht Orzack and Carol Ross, "Should Virtual Sex Be Treated Like Other Sex Addictions?" in Al Cooper, ed., *Cybersex: The Dark Side of the Force: A Special Issue of the Journal, Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* (New York NY: Routledge, 2000), 120.

It scared me that my fiancé went to Internet sites to see young girls [aged 14 and up]. I talked with my pastor about it and he told me he thought it was just curiosity, that once we were married, my husband's curiosity would be filled by me. Now that we are married, I find that he has continued his acting out and lied to me so much that I am afraid of what could happen if we have children and one is a girl.

Dr. Schneider observes that some people "were so committed to being non-judgmental that they missed the big picture." As with this pastor, she explains, "What's the big deal about online sex?...is the most common question that is asked by persons who focus on the absence of skin-to-skin contact during cybersex activities, and cannot understand why marriages actually break up over the issue." The answers she received from spouses are:

*like any addiction, the tolerance level rises and more stimulation is needed to maintain the desired result;

*spouses object to it as adultery;

*they find the "lying, hiding one's activities, and covering up" "painful";

*spouses feel "betrayed, devalued, deceived" and "abandoned," the "same as with a real affair";

*"cybersex takes away from the sexual relationship of the couple" – it is diverted;

*"real-life" spouses "cannot compete with fantasy," with an ideal.

*time and emotional involvement are taken away, resulting in "emotional detachment from the marriage";

*this leads to objectifying of women;

*"it impacts children to find pornography left on the computer or to overhear phone sex. As one woman said, 'One daughter became promiscuous, the other wants me to leave him. My son now thinks that hurting women is normal.' Children lose respect for the addict or themselves become addicted to pornography."

Among spouses, she reports, "depressive symptoms, isolation, loss of libido, a 'dead' marriage, their own dysfunctional behaviors in some cases (affairs, excessive drinking, violence)."[12]

That these dysfunctions are directly related to cybersex is reported by psychologists Kimberly Young of the Center for Online Addiction, private practioner Eric Griffin-Shelley, Al Cooper of Stanford University, and James O'Mara and Jennifer Buchanan of the University of Pittsburgh when they note: "Many couples report no significant marital problems prior to receiving a home computer and getting involved in a cyberaffair…After a few months, as they engage in a variety of Internet sexual experiences one partner may begin to make the comparison between an attractive online lover, who seems to fulfill every emotional need, and the current partner, who seems dull, routine, and boring in comparison. Ultimately, these cyber-relationships are typically revealed to be an unrealistic and self-created persona: however, they seem all too real inside the mind of the online user."[13]

As for the causes of cybersex addiction, sexologists Mark F. Schwartz and Stephen Southern call cybersex a "courtship disorder," often being a "dissociative experience in which a person escapes the demands of daily life, as well as the pain and shame of past trauma…reenacting aspects of past losses, conflicts, or taumas in order to foster illusions of power and love."

12 Jennifer P. Snider, "Effects of Cybersex Addiction on the Family: Results of a Survey," *Cybersex: The Dark Side of the Force, A Special Issue of the Journal, Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 54, 44, 47, 53.

13 Kimberly S. Young, Eric Griffin Shelley, Al Cooper, James O'Mara, Jennifer Buchanan, "Online Infidelity: A New Dimension in Couple Relationships with Implications for Evaluation and Treatment," *Cybersex*, 71.

How deeply such a "World of Illusions"[14] can scar a cybersex addict can be seen on the poignant BBC Wonderland Video, "Virtual Adultery and Cyberspace Love,"[15] wherein Carolyn, an American mother of four children, explains her addiction to living most of each day for months vicariously through an avatar, at the expense of her family. Extolling the freedom, she enthuses, "It was like being reborn again – the possibilities were endless." In Carolyn's case, as her addiction escalated, she directed her substitute self into a relationship with the avatar of a British man, though both she and her real life husband were realizing that a border between fantasy and reality was being crossed. As Carolyn admitted, having her cartoon representative go out to dinner with another persona "felt like real dates." Her real-life husband complained, "She'll say it was just all role play, but role play is one thing, but where she took it wasn't role play. It was real." The seductive power of the secondary world was subtle. "It kind of hit me before I really knew what was happening," Carolyn explained. Eventually her British counterpart became uncomfortable with the deepening relationship, especially when, to his obvious chagrin, Carolyn booked a real life trip to England and arrived for a visit at his real home in his real life.[16] "I decided it wasn't right," he concluded about the escalation into real life. As he pulled completely out of the relationship, Carolyn was left standing in the ruins of her shattered "world of illusions," estranged from her real life husband and children, and from her virtual lover, for whom their relationship had indeed been nothing but illusion.

The *telos* of such an unhealthy fantasy seems to have momentarily peaked in several cases in Japan. One came to light when a young Japanese wife named Yurie was interviewed by Japanese Tech culture expert, Lisa Katayama, of the widely read TokyoMango.com website. Yurie's husband, Koh, had fallen in love with a virtual girlfriend from Nintendo's Love Plus, dating simulator game. Such *nakige* (crying games) are immensely popular in Japan, reportedly appealing to one's "emotional side."[17] Although Yurie dismissed "Koh's virtual indiscretions" with "if he's just enjoying it as a game, that's fine with me,"[18] she may now be reconsidering such a cavalier dismissal since a 27 year old Tokyo man has made headlines by marrying in real life a character from the same Love Plus game before "a priest, an MC, a DJ…friends and family" with "photo slideshows, wedding music and even a bouquet." How is such an action possible? In Japanese Shinto belief, the line between animate and inanimate objects is less distinct than in Christianity (as I noted in my previous article, "Should the *Imago Dei* Be Extended to Robots? *Love and Sex with Robots*, the Future of Marriage, and the Christian Concept of Personhood.")[19] Sal 9000, as the young groom calls himself, says of his "first human-to-avatar union," "I love this character, not a machine…I understand 100 percent that this is a game. I understand very well that I cannot marry her physically or legally." Yet, he contends this animated character is "better than a human girlfriend," concluding, "Some people have expressed doubts about my actions, but at the end of the day, this

14 Mark F. Schwartz and Stephen Southern, "Compulsive Cybersex: The New Tea Room," *Cybersex,* 127-28.

15 Wonderland-Virtual Adultery and Cyberspace Love, video broadcast Jan 30, 2008, BBC Two (UK) http://www.downarchive.com/movies/documentary/46557-bbc-two-wonderland-virtual-adultery-a… , accessed 2/11/2010.

16 "Virtual Adultery and Cyberspace Love."

17 Matteas, "About Dating Simulator Games," http://www.animeraku.com/2009/08/about-dating-simulator-games.html, accessed 2/11/2010, 2. About his virtual romance, Koh reported, "OK, this is pretty embarrassing. The DS has a mic and a touchscreen, so…one time, she asked me to say "I love you" a hundred times into the mic. I was on the airplane when she asked me that, so I was like no way. There was also this part where you have to hold her hand on the touchscreen. If you touch her hand with the stylus, you get to hold her hand. And then there's the part where you have to kiss her," Huffington Post, "Sal 9000: Man Marries Video Game Girlfriend (VIDEO)," http://www.huffintonpost.com/2009/11/23/sal-9000-man-to-marry-vir_n_367579.html, accessed 2/11/2010 1-2. This "marriage" is eerily reminiscent of the romance between a human and a simulated character in William Gibson's 1996 novel, *Idoru*.

18 Asher Moses, "Man Marries Virtual Girlfriend," http://www.stuff.co.nz/technology/digital-living/2100430/Man-marries-virtual-girlfriend, accessed 1/5/2010, 1.

19 Presented at the Evangelical Theological Society's 2008 annual meeting and currently available in the *Africanus Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Nov. 2009), 6-19, available free on-line at http://www.gordonconwell.edu/boston/africanusjournal or in hard copy for $5, plus a minimal mailing cost, from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, CUME Boston Campus bookstore, 90 Warren Street, Boston, MA 02119.

is really just about us as husband and wife. As long as the two of us can go on to create a happy household, I'm sure any misgivings about us will be resolved." Internet-addiction expert Hiroshi Ashizaki notes, "There are many others who can't express themselves like Sal can, and those are the cases we worry about…Today's Japanese youth can't express their true feelings in reality. They can only do it in the virtual world…It's the reverse of reality that they can only talk about what they feel to a friend in the virtual world."[20] In such cases, the world of sexual illusions has eclipsed that of real relational life.

The Christian Response Toward a Cybersex Ethic

Across the internet, Christians have begun to respond to cybersex issues. Rev. Dr. Dan Williams, preaching minister for the College Avenue Church of Christ in El Dorado, Arkansas, whose Ph.D. is in Marriage and Family Therapy, notes, while he himself "cannot imagine anything remotely stimulating about sitting at a computer typing out love notes to some faceless fantasy figure and yet, in my counseling practice, I have already encountered at least a dozen divorces that began with one partner's illicit Internet interactions." He reports, "Some chat room flirtations lead to an actual physical rendezvous." He also cites Matthew 5:28, Jesus' words about committing adultery by looking lustfully at someone, seeing the import of Jesus' words "that untamed thoughts so often lead to unfortunate consequences!" He explains that "affairs most often begin with emotional bonds, not physical ones," and that any "secret fantasies fueled by pornography, phone sex, or cyber-romances are not merely solitary pursuits – they are sins that have the potential to destroy the marriage bond," since "virtual adultery betrays the trust and erodes the closeness necessary to maintain a healthy marriage." His advice is not to underestimate the power of virtual sex, but shun it completely and work on improving one's real marriage.[21] The *Atlantic's* self-described Christian "social conservative scold," Ross Douthat, who has written such articles as "Is Pornography Adultery?" believes, "The Internet era has ratcheted the experience of pornography much closer to adultery than I suspect most porn users would like to admit."[22] Reformed Christian blogger, Tim Challies, author of *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, thinks the key is preventative, to emphasize rather than ban on-line dating as an activity for singles but forbid it for the married. He sees such cyber dating as a boon since, in fact, it "removes the physical dimension, at least for a time, while increasing the necessity and the depth of communication."[23] This would obviously preclude virtual sex.

Encouraging such discussions and pooling a pan-denominational set of insights toward the end of establishing a policy for approaching internet relationships that can be agreed upon by Christians across the spectrum and taught in our churches and institutions would seem to make sense, since simply attempting to ban participation in Second Life altogether, in which so many Christians are already involved, is unrealistic, especially since it affords an opportunity where we can learn to be more subtle "cybermissionaries" in the internet's pluralistic environment, while working out a set of ethics for avatarian behavior."[24]

Helpful for coming up with such an ethical policy is the thought of Christian futurist Ian Barbour. In his book, *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, which is volume two of his Gifford Lectures

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20 Kyung Lah, "Tokyo Man Marries Video Game Character," http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/12/16/japan.virtual.wedding/index.html?eref+rss_tec…, accessed 1/2/2010, 1-2, among other sites, pictures are available at "Man Marries a Video Game – First-ever and the Weirdest," http://pinoytutorial.com/bestandworst/man-marries-a-video-game-%e2%80%93-first-ever-and-the…, accessed 2/11/2010, 2-3.

21 Dan Williams, "Virtual Adultery," http://www.cacoc.org/virtual _adultery.htm, accessed 2/11/2010, 1-2.

22 Ross Douthat, quoted in Jennie Rothenberg Gritz, "Virtual Adultery," http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200809u/pornography, 1.

23 Tim Challies, "Virtual Cheating in a Virtual World: Second Life and cheating in a virtual world," http://www.challies.com/archives/articles/virtual-cheating-in-a-virtual-world.php, accessed 2/12/2010, 2.

24 See, for example, Brian Glenney, "Cyberworlds, Cyberethics, Cybermissionaries," *Stillpoint: The Magazine of Gordon College*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Fall, 2009), 18-19, stillpoint@gordon.edu

at the University of Aberdeen from 1990-91, he observes that a central problem is "we have turned technology into a religion, seeking meaning and salvation through new technologies."[25] That observation suggests to me that our critical acumen may well be suspended as we enter a fantasy world much in the way we practice suspension of belief when we enter a theater, wherein cinema influences so much of public opinion. If his religion metaphor holds, we may be subtly persuaded momentarily to reattach or realign our beliefs to a new set in the domain of what is, in effect, a cybergod. Defining "technology" as "the application of organized knowledge to practical tasks by ordered systems of people and machines,"[26] Prof. Barbour warns that the blessing of "freedom as participation," wherein "the positive side of freedom is *the presence of opportunities for choice,*" is also a curse, since "the negative side of freedom is *the absence of external constraints.*"[27] Ian Barbour cautions that "abstract ethical principles do not in themselves provide motivation for ethical action, which involves the will and the affections as well as the intellect."[28] Wisely, he observes that one is held in check by "religion," as it "reminds us that we are not isolated individuals but members of communities with common memories and a shared life."[29]

But, this sort of ordering is precisely what I notice may be missing in a digital world without a long-term community in which one has been born and reared. In fact, a digital world may be infused with both aspects of freedom. Further, this world has been ordered by fallen humans who created it, not by the perfect God who fashioned our real moral universe. The virtual world may have secondary morality because the human beings (at this point) who have constructed it are themselves inhabitants of a moral universe, but the impact of that universe may have been dissipated in transfer, two steps from the God who is the primary creator, distorted by its secondary creation by fallen lesser beings.

The lens of the curse of such freedom is certainly another tool through which to analyze the plight of Carolyn, the mother of four chronicled in the Wonderland video. The all-consuming "lack of constraints," as Ian Barbour warned, eventually filled eighteen to nineteen hours of each of her days with a virtual life, becoming a curse destroying Carolyn's marriage, as she abandoned her family and children to pursue her fantasy in real life only to find herself abandoned in turn when she crossed back over the line between fantasy and reality.

The key to understanding the power and thus the need to set guidelines for use of such media as Second Life for Christians seems to begin with understanding that "our brains are not specialized for 21st-century media," as Stanford University Communications Professor Byron Reeves notes: "There's no switch that says, 'Process this differently because it's on screen.'"[30]

While, for some users, interactive worlds like Second Life may remain an elaborate video game, for others, such worlds may begin to meld with real life, becoming such an intrinsic part of one's daily routine that a virtual occupation may begin to pay the real-life bills and substitute itself for an occupation in the real world, and a virtual relationship may become a real-life relationship, as in the case of a couple, identifying themselves by their avatarian names Damien Fate and Washu Zebrastripe, who courted on Second Life, married in real life, now have a baby named "Linden" in honor of the laboratory that developed Second Life and "have long made their real world living through Second Life" businesses they have developed.[31] And, finally, for those for whom real life has ceased to hold any promise, like the disabled British couple or Ric Hoogestraat, or even the able-

25 Ian Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 262.
26 Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology,* 3.
27 Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, 38-39. Here he applies the thinking of philosopher Joel Feinberg.
28 Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology*, 41.
29 Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology,* 42.
30 Tim Challies, "Virtual Cheating in a Virtual World," 2. This well-publicized statement is also recorded by Wall Street Journal reporter Alexandra Alter in "Is This Man Cheating on His Wife?" 3.
31 Wagner James Au, "Sex and Romance," 13.

bodied, disaffected Carolyn, the mother of four, and the relationally-challenged Sal 9000, the virtual realm may be embraced to the extent that it becomes for them a substitution for real life, itself, the site of their real emotional life relationships, even while some of them may go through the motions of living with a spouse. These have literally become lost in the ether.   Progressively, they distance from their real life family. The door through which they have floated from spaceship earth, and which has closed behind them and now locked them out, was cybersex.
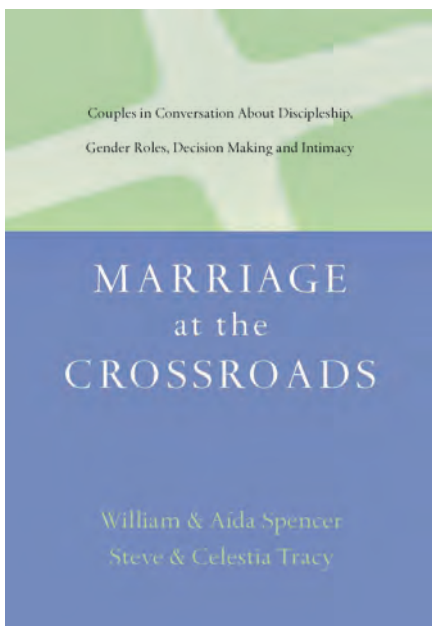
Conclusion

In light of all this, it seems clear to me that, in regard to virtual relationships, applying Jesus' words about imaginative lust to virtual lust is compelling and conclusive. The view that virtual sex is pornography and lethal to one's spiritual health and to one's relationships in the real world, including one's marriage, to me seems indisputable, given the results. While participation in digital worlds, chat rooms, and other social networking may be as inevitable as any involvement in this world, we should take care to conduct ourselves ethically in the fantasy realm exactly as we do in the real realm, being the same Christians with the same ethics in both, since the focus here is who we are and what we do as conscious Christians. It behooves us all to work together to set policies for the virtual issues currently facing us, so we can keep pace with such changes and not be taken unawares. In the case of virtual adultery, a cross-section of Christian thinkers have already agreed it is sinful. Each denomination or independent church or organization should make a statement in some publication decrying pornography and the practice of virtual sex with those other than one's real-life spouse. We should also make our constituencies aware of valuable resources on the net both Christian and secular, while developing such resources ourselves.

Throughout the Bible, our loyalty to our spouses has been paralleled with our primal loyalty to our God. Secularly created digital worlds, we note, have a pluralistic bias. As the Bible presents fealty to one spouse as a metaphor for fealty to one God, perhaps the inverse holds as well. Syncretistic polytheism in faith, recognizing all or many gods as worthy to be worshiped together, may encourage a pluralism in relationships, as in pagan times when spouses, slaves, *heterai*, temple prostitutes, all comprised a pool of sexual relationships. The fact that we digitalize our desires does not annul the metaphor. We in the church, imaged in the Bible as the "bride of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2) need to stay loyal to our divinely sanctioned commitment to our one God and our one spouse in reality as well as in fantasy, that is, in the body as well as in the mind.

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Idolatry and Poverty: Social Action as Christian Apologetics

Chip M. Anderson

There are more idols than realities in the world;
that is my "evil eye" for this world; that is also my "evil ear."
~Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

How should non-poor evangelical Christians think Christianly about being a believer in a capitalistic, free market economic society where there are almost 40 million people living in poverty, where 18% of children live with the effects of poverty, and, where 42% of children born in the bottom income quintile will remain in that quintile as adults?[1] At the risk of setting up too many straw men, typically, answers to this question tend to revolve around *individual accountability vs. corporate responsibility* and/or *the individual vs. the state*. Issues of poverty are almost automatically, by default, arranged in *private vs. public* dichotomies, arguments, and responsibilities, which sets up a defective social construction of reality for the Christian.

Most Christians, conservative and liberal, agree that the poor are to be cared for, but the range, methodologies, and degree, as well as government involvement are areas of disagreement. Some Christians give the impression they do not have other than a political affiliation or economic preference as a framework to engage the issue of poverty. Furthermore, the banal posture of many non-poor Christians to the poor can lead to the "bystander effect,"[2] leaving many Christians out of any active role in assisting those affected by poverty or addressing the causes of poverty.

Regarding the issue of poverty in America, there is a lot at-stake for many people, Christians included: constitutional rights, entitlements, property rights, taxes, freedom, upward mobility. Sides often cast opposing socio-economic approaches to solving issues of poverty as a threat to society or a cause for continued poverty. For most on the political right, the free market system with minimal interference from the government and private charity is what will ameliorate poverty; those on the political left stress public responsibility and that government is to deconstruct "unjust" structures and utilize its power to distribute resources more equitably. While most non-poor Christians understand there is a general biblical call to help the poor, they, too, are often divided left and right, *public vs. private*. The Christian is then faced with the choice of leaning toward one as biblical, while labeling the other as unbiblical.

Christian discussions about poverty and the *private vs. public* approaches that claim to reduce the conditions of poverty often involve the Old Testament. Interestingly, in Mark's Gospel, not only does he utilize the Old Testament to develop the content of the Gospel, he also draws from Old Testament texts and contexts where idolatry and the poor are juxtaposed. It seems we do have a biblical paradigm for discussing poverty that actually focuses application down to, not what the government or charitable individuals think or do, but how the Christian and the Christian community define themselves and how they are associated with the poor. In the following, I will explore this idolatry-poverty juxtaposition and will seek to apply its significance to how non-poor Christians ought to think about the issue of poverty.

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1 Approximately 13% currently live at or below the Federal poverty level (US Census Bureau, 2009 estimate; also the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor); see also Mark Rank, *One Nation Underprivileged* (New York: Oxford Press, 2005); J. B. Isaacs, I. V. Sawhill, R. Haskins, "Economic Mobility of Families Across Generations" in *Getting Ahead or Losing Ground: Economic Mobility in America* (The Brookings Institution and The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008); Gregory Acs and Seth Zimmerman, "U.S. Intragenerational Mobility From 1984-2004: Trends and Implications" (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008).

2 i.e., *the diffusion of responsibility*.

Idolatry: A Biblical Paradigm for Thinking about Poverty

Christian responses to poverty often draw from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7; Luke 6), further substantiated by other New Testament teaching (e.g., Acts 2-4; Jas 1-2). Although important, this tends to be applied more to church-life and to the private sphere rather than developing a response to those living with the effects of poverty. Others turn to the Pentateuch and the Prophets, and, rightly so, for such biblical material is rich in addressing the issues of poverty. The results, however, can tend toward justification for political alignment and socio-economic policies (right/left, conservative/liberal). Christians across the spectrum wrestle with how the Pentateuch and the prophets apply in the (post)modern world. Many question the contemporary relevance of such documents of antiquity addressed to an ancient nation whose social-political location is the Ancient Near East. Nonetheless, there is a way to decipher the significance of Old Testament ethical texts, namely to draw significance from their incorporation into the Gospel itself.

Mark draws upon a fascinating range of Old Testament contexts throughout his narrative that juxtapose idolatry and the economically vulnerable. Although Mark's use of the Old Testament is extensive beyond these particular texts, he embeds his Gospel with Old Testament contexts related to the economically vulnerable, whether Law, land-stipulation, or prophetic announcement, which also contain, within the context or flow of thought, mention of idolatry.

Gospel of Mark	OT references to the Economically Vulnerable and to Idolatry
Mark 1:2-3	Exod 23; Mal 3; Isa 40
Mark 1:17	Jer 16; Amos 4
Mark 3-4	Isa 1-6; Zech 7
Mark 4:32	Dan 4; Ezek 17
Mark 7:6-7	Isa 29; Exod 20, 21; Lev 20; Deut 5
Mark 10:4	Deut 24
Mark 10:19	Exod 20; Deut 5
Mark 11:12-21	Jer 7-8
Mark 12:1	Isa 5
Mark 12:31	Lev 19
Mark 12:41ff.	Exod 22; Lev 19, 23; Deut 14, 24; Mal 3; Isa 1, 10
Mark 13:1ff.	Mal 3
Mark 13:2	Jer 7
Mark 14:7	Deut 15
Mark 15:33	Amos 8

Mark begins his narrative utilizing an Old Testament composite of three texts which juxtapose idolatry and the economically vulnerable (Exod 23; Mal 3; Isa 40). Then afterward, Jesus calls for followers with the promise they will *become fishers of men* (Mark 1:17),[3] drawing upon Old Testament contexts (Jer 16; Amos 4) that reference idolatry and the poor. Mark embeds Isaiah

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3 All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

1-6 into the fabric of the Beelzebul and the Sower parables (3:22-4:20), culminating in his use of the Isaiah idolatry-taunt (Isa 6:9f; Mark 4:11f.). Isaiah 1-6 builds a case against Israel for its idolatry and the disregard for the economically vulnerable. Then, Mark reaches back to Daniel 4 and Ezekiel 17 to explain the presence and nature of the Kingdom (Mark 4:30ff.), both provide contexts regarding idolatry and the poor (cf. Ezek 18). As Jesus makes His *way* to Jerusalem (Mark 10-12), Mark draws on Jeremiah 7-8, which also contains language and references to idolatry and the economically vulnerable (cf. Jer 2-5). The *widow vs. duplicitous scribes* story (Mark 12:38ff.) that bridges the *way* to Jerusalem and the eschatological discourse (Mark 13) is formed by references to Exodus 20, Leviticus 19, Deuteronomy 15 and 24, Jeremiah 7, and such texts as Isaiah 10, Zechariah 7, and Malachi 3, all of which contain the twin references to idolatry and the economically vulnerable.

For Christians, the fact that Pentateuchal material and prophetic pronouncements form some background to our view of social justice, whether right or left, conservative or liberal, should provoke our interest, for these very texts also form our understanding of the Gospel. The Gospel is associated programmatically with the issue of idolatry *and* with those affected by poverty, which ought to (re)form our understanding of Christian discipleship and evangelism.

An Apologetic Level: The Poor, the Ancient Near East, and Image-bearers

Although few doubt the Christian call to serve the poor, the Bible, however, is not the first set of ancient documents to promote the protection and care for the poor, nor did Jews and Christians invent our concepts of justice. The world of the ANE was very familiar with the care and protection to be given the poor, particularly by its deities, monarchs, and sovereigns.[4] The concept and practice was pre-Israelite and pre-dated Israelite propheticism.[5] Israel was indeed unique in excluding the worship of other gods besides Yahweh, but much of the ethical content associated with the biblical God can be found elsewhere in the ancient world.[6] As for the caring and protecting of the poor, there was little *new under the religious and socio-economic sun.* From the beginning of recorded history, people, societies, and governing structures (whether Empires or "at the city gate") have all struggled with *how to assist the poor*.[7] The Pentateuchal texts compare, even regarding the poor, to Sumerian and Akkadian Laws of Babylon.[8] Protection for the unfortunate, the poor, and indigent was "common policy" in the ANE and was not "unfamiliar to the Western Semites." What is of particular interest is that the defense of the poor was "seen as a virtue of gods, kings, and judges," essentially a policy of virtue that proved the piety and character of a ruler, monarch, or god.[9]

In light of antecedent ANE concerns for the poor, the uniqueness for the Israelite is that everything narrows down to *one God* who is alone righteous, who brings about justice for the poor. *Thus, enter the strong warnings against having other deities before Yahweh and the prohibitions against any form of idolatry (political allegiance or cult) that would challenge the place of Yahweh as the one true God.* Idolatry alone was the ultimate expression of unfaithfulness to God, fully deserving divine judgment. The Genesis creation account is set within a *God vs. the gods* polemic.

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4 F. Charles Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *JNES* XXI (April, 1962): 129-139; Edward P. Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart: A Study in Biblical Theology* (New York: T&T International, 2006), 5; Cyril S. Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 168-169.

5 C. Wright, "What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel: Old Testament Sabbatical Institutions for Land, Debts, and Slaves, Part I," *EvQ* LVI (July, 1984): 129-38; Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor."

6 Baruch Halpern, Jon D. Levenson, and Frank M. Cross, *Traditions in Transformation* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 55.

7 John D. Mason, "Biblical Teaching and Assisting the Poor," in *The Best in Theology* (eds. J.I. Packer and Paul Fromer; Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Inc, 1987), 2:295.

8 Umberto Moshe David Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Skokie: Varda Books, 2005), 258ff.; also see G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburg: Presbyterian Board of Colportage, 1955).

9 Fensham, "Widow, Orphan and the Poor."

The ten-plagues against Egypt and the Pharaoh were executed to demonstrate Yahweh's place as the true God. Later in 1 and 2 Kings, Israelite kings are portrayed as either good or bad "purely on religious grounds," whether "they destroyed or introduced idols." There is a polemic thread running through the Old Testament that idols and the gods or monarchs they reflect are "powerless" (cf., Pss 115; 135), unable to perform virtuous acts, and there is not profit in trusting them (Hab 2:18-19).[10] The Old Testament presents the God of the Exodus as the one true God who ultimately cares for and protects the poor.

Yahweh's Care, Protection, and Vindication of Economically Vulnerable	
"You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless."	Exod 22:22-24
"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing."	Deut 10:18
A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation.	Ps 68:5
The LORD protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, But He thwarts the way of the wicked.	Ps 146:9
"Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you."	Deut 15:9
So that they caused the cry of the poor to come to Him, And that He might hear the cry of the afflicted.	Job 34:28
You have seen it, for You have beheld mischief and vexation to take it into Your hand The unfortunate commits himself to You; You have been the helper of the orphan.	Ps 10:14
To vindicate the orphan and the oppressed, So that man who is of the earth will no longer cause terror.	Ps 10:18

Deuteronomy 10 contains one of the clearest passages that portray the God of the Old Testament as the Chief Advocate and Defender of the economically vulnerable. This text also very clearly links God's righteous virtue in providing for the poor to idolatry.

> "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the

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10   Brian S. Rosner, "The Concept of Idolatry," *Them* 24/3 (1999): 21-30.

LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing" (Deut 10:12-18).

As Israel was encamped on the border of the land of promise, this was an appeal to renew fidelity to the original "Book of the Covenant" land-management stipulations.[11] The command to reflect God's righteousness is heard in admonitions to "fear the LORD," "walk in all his ways," *to love* and *serve* Him, and *keep his commands* (v. 12). An Exodus covenant-memory is placed before them and, then, comparison to other gods is made. Despite claims by other ANE deities and their earthy image-bearers, the God of the Exodus is the one true God, who owns all of creation (…*to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it*, v. 14). He is *the God of gods* and *Lord of lords,* who cannot be bribed nor does He show *partiality* (v. 17). To bring about such *impartiality,* God shows partiality by doing justice for the economically vulnerable, showing them love by granting the basic necessities of life.

Peoples of the ANE all had social regulations that were part of royal legislation and subject to the state's administration of justice.[12] *Thus, enter the biblical concentration on land-management stipulations related to the economically vulnerable.* This is where the significance resides: The protection and advocacy for the poor were polemical, part of an apologetic for God against the false gods and their image-bearers. The prohibition against idolatry not only was to maintain a distinction between Creator and creation,[13] the distinction was to be actualized through maintaining virtues of righteousness, in particular virtues associated with caring for the poor.

The prohibition against images and idols has a slight twist to it, namely, there is a religious logic at play: It was understood that a pagan deity was present in its image[14] and the human monarchs or sovereigns were considered to be image-bearers of their deity. For example, in an inscription concerning the temple for the god Amun, the god calls King Amenhotep, "My son… My living image."[15] ANE monarchs were considered "sons" of their gods, representing the image of their god through how they ruled.[16] This is paralleled, first, in Genesis where Adam is the image of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6) and inferred as God's son (cf. Gen 5:7; cf. Luke 3:38). Later in Exodus, Israel is called God's son (Exod 4:22; cf. Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1; Matt 2:15; Rom 9:4).[17] This is particularly important in regards to the ethical stipulations where God demonstrates His righteous virtues in protecting and caring for the poor. As God's image-bearer, the work of God's hands, Israel was to reflect *His righteousness* (Isa 60:21; 61:3, 11: 62:1-2; cf. Isa 42:21; 45:23-24; 59:16-17; 63:1).[18] And, as the present Spirit-image-bearers, so now believers and the Church are to reflect such righteousness.[19]

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11 Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 451.

12 H. Eberhard von Waldow, "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 182-204.

13 G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), 18; Cassuto, Exodus, 236-37.

14 Rosner "The Concept of Idolatry"; also note: *gods of silver* and *gods of gold*, Exod 20:23; *god of gold*, Exod 32:31; *molten gods*, Lev 19:4; *put away the gods which your fathers served*, Josh 24:14; *every nation still made gods of its own*, 2 Kgs 17:29; 19:18.

15 Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 131.

16 Ibid.

17 The reference to Jesus as God's Son in Mark 1:11 (…and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased") could be drawn from Exod 4:22, a referent where Israel is referred to as God's Son.

18 Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 277.

19 E.g., Col 3; Gal 5; Rom 8; 1 Pet 3; Jas 1-2.

The Land and the Earth Belong to God

The paradigmatic use of Old Testament ethical contexts is also affirmed by the fact that the whole earth belongs to the biblical God, the true owner of *the land*.[20] God's laws were intended to enlighten the nations (cf. Deut 4:5-8), so the Old Testament ethical principles, symbols, and mediating structures should find significance for all cultures.[21] C. J. H. Wright assumes that "if God gave Israel certain specific institutions and laws, they were based on principles which have universal validity." All social contexts should be brought "nearer to conformity with the principles underlying" the Old Testament paradigm, because the same God who is the Redeemer and law-giver of Israel is also the Creator and Ruler of all humanity.[22] The institutions God gave to govern early Israelite society and *the ethical emphases* of these institutions are intended to inform all peoples (Gen 18:18; Isa 2:3; 51:4). The ethical emphases of the Pentateuch find affirmation throughout the Bible (e.g., Luke 16:19-31), along with references to God's covenantal love (Lev 19:18) as fulfillment of the "Law and Prophets" (Matt 19:19; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8).[23] As Israel was to be a light to the nations, "Israel's socio-economic life and institutions, therefore, have a paradigmatic or exemplary function in principle."[24]

The Old Testament affirms God's ownership "as extending over the whole earth and including every living and inanimate thing upon it."[25] Even property under Mosaic Law was not truly private as we are conditioned to think through American mediating structures (e.g., history, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, local zoning laws, etc.); it was related to family and economic sustainability—a key to understanding the role of the land and the proper view of ownership.[26] The land was a *gift*, and, as such, land holders were formed by the relationship of Yahweh to the land: Yahweh was the King over Israel, who owned all the land and made distinct demands reflecting His righteousness to those whom He gave it to use. Under Yahweh, each family had their own land: not necessarily individual plots of land, but land associated with the tribe, the family. Israel's ideal was a form of decentralized extended-family ownership as stewardship under Yahweh's absolute ownership.[27] This is important for understanding the relationship of those *in power* with the economically vulnerable: Those *at the gate* are not to centralize power and make decisions that disregard the reason for the distribution of land, particularly family economic stability (one reason for shunning the development of a monarchy in Israel). The people's relationship to the land was to reflect the virtues of God in contrast to surrounding deities and their image-bearers. There was an apologetic to be demonstrated through the people's relationship to the land.

Land-management stipulations regarding the economically vulnerable and the poor are set within a *God vs. the gods* polemic, actually raising justice for the poor to the level of apologetics and evangelism. As for the one true God, if He does not provide for and protect the economically vulnerable, then He is no God at all—at most, just one god among other gods. Furthermore, when the people who are to reflect His image do not provide a profile and outcomes reflecting such concern and advocacy, not only does this diminish His glory, but also negates the witness and proclamation of His name to outsiders. It should be no surprise, then, that the Gospel is defined by Old Testament contexts where poverty and idolatry are at issue. With the inauguration of the

20   C. Wright, "What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel, Part I."
11 Note Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 49ff.; see also C. J. H. Wright, "Biblical Reflections on Land," *ERT* 17 (1993): 153-167.
22   C. J. H. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye: The Place of the Old Testament Ethics* Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1982), 162.
23   John Mason, "Centralization and Decentralization in Social Arrangements: Explorations into Biblical Social Ethics," *Journal of the Association of Christian Economists*, No. 13 (1992): 3-38.
24   C. J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), xviii; also see Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 442.
25   C. Wright, *God's People*, 116; Wright refers to Pss. 24:1; 89:11; 95:4-5; Jer. 27:4ff.; Hag. 2:8; 1 Chr. 29:11.
26   Ibid., 134-136, 141.
27   Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics: Why Are Christians Missing the Chance to Really Change the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 118.

Kingdom and the Church and believers as His image-bearers, there remains the same apologetic concerning God's righteous acts on behalf of the poor. Thus, it seems reasonable that outcomes related to the protection, care, and advocacy of the economically vulnerable can be components of evangelistic activities.

The Gospel of Mark and the Juxtaposition of Idolatry and Poverty

Mark tends to reference the Old Testament at critical points in his narrative and "prefers certain categories of texts for particular concerns."[28] This is very noticeable in how Mark crafts his narrative using Old Testament texts that juxtapose the issue of idolatry and texts that bring to mind Exodus land-management stipulations related to the economically vulnerable and words of judgment for abandoning them. Mark is quite consistent and intentional in this use—and *at critical places* (cf. Mark 1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13)—thus, making them most likely programmatic for understanding the Gospel and, as well, the nature of discipleship and evangelism.

The Programmatic Summary (Mark 1:1-3)

Mark begins his narrative with a composite Old Testament quotation (Exod 23:20; Mal 3:1; Isa 40:3) that contains juxtaposed references to poverty and idolatry. Mark draws from the concluding summary (Exod 23:20-23) of the "Book of the Covenant" (20:1-23:33), which immediately contains warnings against idolatry (*You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them…*, 23:24; *You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods…*, 23:32-33). Essentially, the entire "Book of the Covenant" is structured around this theme. Heading the foundational Ten-Words (Exod 20:1-17) are a command to have no other gods before Yahweh (v. 3) and the prohibition of idolatry in any form (vv. 4-5). Even the Ten-Words are bracketed with prohibitions against *forms* of idolatry, for the tenth commandment (*You shall not covet*, 20:17) is associated throughout the Old Testament with idolatry (cf. Exod 20:23; Deut 7:25; Isa 1:29; 44:9; Ps 115:4).[29] Then, after Israel affirms hearing Yahweh (Exod 20:18-22), Moses begins to unpack the Ten-Words. Idolatry leads the record (*You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves…*, Exod 20:23-24).

The first time the economically vulnerable trio (*the widow, orphan, and stranger*) are mentioned in Exodus, idolatry frames the pericope (Exod 22:18-20; 23:13).[30] First, Moses presents a trio of commands prohibiting idolatrous behavior,[31] each with a consequence of death: *You shall not allow a sorceress to live*, Exod 22:18; *Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death,* v. 19; *He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed*, v. 20. This is immediately followed by land-management stipulations concerning the economically vulnerable trio: *You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him… You shall not afflict any widow or orphan* (22:21-22).

As the consequence of idolatry is death, so also is not fulfilling the codes related to the economically vulnerable. They are mirror-retributive in nature: oppressing the poor provokes their outcry to God, bringing about *the sword*, making those who violate these land-management stipulations just like the poor, becoming *widows* and *fatherless* and, thus, economically vulnerable

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28   Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 27.

29   Cf. Isa 2:7, 20; 13:17; 30:22; 31:7; 40:19; 46:6; Hos 2:8; 8:4; Hab 2:19; 1:18; Zech 6:11; cf. Isa 39:2; 60:9; Jer 10:4, 9; Ezek 7:19; 16:13, 17; 28:4; Zech 9:3; and note Acts 20:33; see Marvin L. Chaney, "'Coveting Your Neighbor's House' in Social Context," in *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness* (ed. William P. Brown; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 302-317; Cyrus H. Gordon, "A Note on the Tenth Commandment," J*ournal of the American Academy of Religion* XXXI(2) (1963): 208-209; Patrick D. Miller, "Property and Possession in Light of Ten Commandments," in *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life* (eds. William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 17-50.

30   Note, Exod 23:19, *You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother,* also reflects a prohibition against idolatrous practices.

31   John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3; Waco: Word, 1987), 327; Childs, *Exodus*, 478; Stuart, *Exodus*, 551ff.

as well (vv. 23-24). Then, there is a set of codes that promote the protection of the vulnerable trio from prolonged and generational poverty (vv. 25-27), strangers are not to be oppressed/defrauded (23:9), and the seventh year rest of the fields, where the natural growth is to be left for the poor (23:12).[32] The segment then closes with a repeated warning against idolatry (*Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth*, Exod 23:13). Exodus 23:20ff. reminds and warns that the land-stipulations are to be obeyed, repeating the prohibitions against idolatry (Exod 23:32-33). Idolatry is the antithesis to obeying the "voice" of the angel (v. 21), the referent for Mark's programmatic summary of the Gospel (Mark 1:2-3).

Moving to the Malachi 3 referent (*sending of God's messenger*, Mal 3:1; cf. Exod 23:20) links John the Baptist as *the messenger* who prepares the way for the Lord (Mark 1:4-8). Overlooked are the contextual concerns regarding the poor that also link the Exodus and Malachi referents. Following Malachi 3:1, the vulnerable trio is encountered (*I will draw near to you for judgment… against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien*, 3:5). Earlier the issue of idolatry was raised: Israel offered *profane sacrifices* and *polluted offerings* (1:7-12); Judah is rebuked *for profaning the sanctuary of the Lord and has married the daughter of a foreign god* (Mal 2:11). Then, in Malachi 3:5, memories are drawn back to the covenant where the vulnerable trio is introduced with the prohibition against *sorcerers* (Mal 3:5; Exod 22:18) and *those who swear falsely* (Mal 3:5; Exod 23:1ff.), texts that recall stipulations regarding social relations, including one's enemy and the needy (Exod 23:1, 7; cf. Exod 20:16; 5:20; Lev 19:11; Jer 5:2, 4; 7:9).

The juxtaposition of idolatry and poverty in Exodus and the memory-judgment context in Malachi bear out the apologetic framework discussed above. Additionally, Mark's constant use of Isaiah also reinforces this framework, which is particularly vivid in Isaiah 40, a component of Mark's programmatic summary. Mark's Isaiah referent itself—*A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God"* (Isa 40:3; cf. Mark 1:3)—carries imagery common to Isaiah's world, reflecting the procession of ANE monarchs. Here, Yahweh comes as Victor-king, announcing the *Good News* (v. 9), *where all flesh* will see *the glory of the LORD* (v. 5). Isaiah 40 then compares Yahweh to surrounding idolatrous nations, which *are like a drop from a bucket* (v. 15) and *are as nothing before Him . . . less than nothing and meaningless* (v. 17; cf. v. 23). Mark's introduction contrasts the Gospel to the concept of the imperial cult of Caesar linking it with the apologetic of Isaiah, emphasizing the incomparability of Yahweh, whose sovereign power over creation is boasted of (v. 12) and affirmed to be in need of no-one's counsel regarding justice (vv. 13-14). Yahweh is distinct from the image-bearers made of gold and silver who need to be fashioned by human-hands (vv. 19-20), for He *sits above the circle of the earth and stretches out the heavens like a curtain* (v. 22).[33] The Holy One takes on all-comers: *To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal?* (v. 25). Isaiah notes the starry hosts (v. 26), each representing idolatrous pagan powers, yet it is Yahweh who *created* them and calls them by name, indicating *His might* and *strength* over the idols of the nations.[34]

Followers Will Become Fishers of Men

Mark moves from his programmatic summary of the Gospel (1:1-3) and the inaugurated presence of the Kingdom (vv. 4-15) to a call for followers: *"Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men"* (Mark 1:17). Although Christians differ over the application of *fishers of*

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32   Probably not a cessation of all crops, which would put animals and the poor at risk, but a principle of rotating crops/fields (see Stuart, *Exodus*, 531).

33   Chip M. Anderson, "Wasted Evangelism" (Mark 4): The Task of Evangelism and Social Action Outcomes" *Africanus Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (November 2009): 39-58; note the Isaianic references to idolatry are usually in the context of Yahweh's incomparableness to the other powers (cf. 42:17; 44:9-10; 45:16, 20; 46:1; 48:5; 57:13; 66:3).

34   False gods totter, Isa 41:7; misplaced trust in idols, 42:17; compared to idols made by hands, 46:5-7; inability to do anything, 48:5; 44:17-20; wearisome, 44:12-13.

men, the Old Testament use of *fishers* and *fishing* yields evidence of an antecedent background that fits the Marken context. The Old Testament concept of *fishing* carries an association with God's act of judgment. Mark draws on this Old Testament thread (Jer 16:16; Amos 4:1-2; cf. Hab 1:14-15; Ezek 29:4-5; 38:4; Isa 37:29), which also contains an apologetic theme and in the primary contexts refers to idolatry and/or the poor (e.g., Jer 16; Amos 4).

The concentration of judgment throughout these texts draws the reader/hearer back to covenantal obedience and to the economically vulnerable. Jeremiah announces that the LORD *will send for many fishermen…and they will fish for them* (Jer 16:16). The reason for God's *fisher*-agents, the people had become idolatrous: *…It is because your forefathers have forsaken Me…and have followed other gods and served them and bowed down to them; but Me they have forsaken and have not kept My law…each one walking according to the stubbornness[35] of his own evil heart…I will hurl you out of this land into the land which you have not known* (Jer 16:11-13). The flow of thought in Jeremiah, where the prophet is the initial *agent* (Jer 15-19), contains numerous references to idolatry (including *God vs. the gods* tauntalogies) as a cause for God's judgment (*…they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable idols and with their abominations…Can man make gods for himself? Yet they are not gods!*, Jer 16:18-20, cf. 17:2; *Yet they did not listen or incline their ears, but stiffened their necks[36] in order not to listen or take correction,* Jer 17:23; *For My people have forgotten Me, they burn incense to worthless gods,* Jer 18:15a).

Similar language is used in Amos 4, Habakkuk 1, Ezekiel 29, where the imagery of *fishing* is a tool of judgment. This, too, has an apologetic nature: Ultimately, this judgment activity of God will reveal that He alone is the LORD (Jer 16:21) and, through it, the nations like Egypt *will know that I am the LORD God* (Ezek 29:6; cf. Ezek 38:23). In Habakkuk, it is through the *fishing* activity that the ungodly, the unrighteous, and those who oppose God are gathered together for judgment (cf. Hab 1:14-15). Moreover, the judgment passages utilizing *fishing* imagery also promise a future remnant, a theme evident in Mark's narrative world.

In the midst of the references to idolatry are reminders—direct and indirect—of covenant stipulations concerning the poor. In Jeremiah 16-18, those who refuse to provide and advocate for the economically vulnerable will become subject to *sword* and *famine*, becoming *childlessness*, that is *widows* and *orphans* (Exod 22:24; cf. Ps 109).

> They will die of deadly diseases, they will not be lamented or buried; they will be as dung on the surface of the ground and come to an end by sword and famine, and their carcasses will become food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth
> (Jer 16:4)

> Therefore, give their children over to famine
> And deliver them up to the power of the sword;
> And let their wives become childless and widowed
> Let their men also be smitten to death,
> Their young men struck down by the sword in battle (Jer 18:21).[37]

Such consequences are reminiscent of covenant promises and warnings:

> You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless (Exod 22:21-24).

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35   Stubbornness = reference to being an idolater (see Beale, *Worship*).

3636   The reference to not listen draws similarities to Isaiah 6 idol-tauntology and *stiffened their necks* pulls the listener back to the original golden-cow-worship in exodus (See Beale, *Worship*).

37   Cf. Deut 32:24, the curse of famine.

Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart (Deut 28:26-28).[38]

In Amos 4:1-2, the focus on judgment specifically addresses the oppression of the economically vulnerable:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria,
  Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
  Who say to your husbands, "Bring now, that we may drink!"
The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness,
  "Behold, the days are coming upon you
  When they will take you away with meat hooks,
  And the last of you with fish hooks" (Amos 4:1-2).

The reference here draws upon the cause of God's judgment, namely affluent women of the Northern Kingdom are oppressing the poor. The mention of *cows of Bashan* could be a pun related to idolatry (*cow* draws us back to the original idol-calves in Exodus) and pin-points the idolatry to wanton wealth accumulation without concern for its effects (as implied in the exuberant, sarcastic comment "to bring on the drinks!"), specifically implying covenant breaking in oppressing/defrauding the poor. Amos 4:1-2 is part of a thread that links covenantal unfaithfulness, misshapen values of wealth accumulation, and oppression of the poor:

Thus says the LORD,
  "For three transgressions of Israel and for four
        I will not revoke its punishment,
        Because they sell the righteous for money
        And the needy for a pair of sandals.
  "These who pant after the very dust of the earth on the head of the helpless
        Also turn aside the way of the humble;
        And a man and his father resort to the same girl
        In order to profane My holy name" (Amos 2:6-7).

Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor
  And exact a tribute of grain from them,
  Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone,
  Yet you will not live in them;
  You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine.

For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great,
  You who distress the righteous and accept bribes
  And turn aside the poor in the gate (Amos 5:11-12).[39]

Hear this, you who trample the needy, to do away with the humble of the land, saying,
  "When will the new moon be over,
  So that we may sell grain,

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38 Cf., *Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow. And all the people shall say, "Amen"* (Deut 27:19); and note in Deut 28:14, there is a curse for serving other gods, reminiscent of plagues on Egypt's gods.

39 The *poor in the gate* refers, not to the poor who "hang out" or loiter at the city gate, but to the role of the leadership who are "at the city gate" and responsible for legislatively applying the covenant stipulations. The Amos context implies that *the poor* were not getting their justice by the municipal leadership/elders *at the city gate* and the injustice was related to the economic well-being of those whose land was not returned as the Sabbath laws commanded, but were subject to *heavy rent*, and thus continuous/prolonged poverty.

>And the sabbath, that we may open the wheat market,
>To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger,
>And to cheat with dishonest scales,
>So as to buy the helpless for money
>And the needy for a pair of sandals,
>And that we may sell the refuse of the wheat?" (Amos 8:4-6).

This thread points to "haves" who prevent "have nots" from escaping out of prolonged poverty. The call to follow Jesus implies a discipleship that is associated with covenant expectations toward the poor and the consequences of idolatrous patterns of social life.

The Inference in the Beelzebul Parable and Mark's Isaiah 6 Idolatry-taunt

The programmatic themes established in Mark 1 prepare the hearer for Jesus' confrontation with *the scribes from Jerusalem* in the Beelzebul story (Mark 3:22ff.). It seems rather simplistic to narrow the Beelzebul[40] parable to the private sphere, namely to those who refuse to accept Jesus as Savior.[41] This misses the text's significance and overlooks Mark's use of antecedent theology.[42] The story is strategically placed at the end of a series of confrontation stories (1:22; 2:6; 2:16; 3:22)[43] and functions as a judgment directed against Jesus' political and religious antagonists. The judgment rendered in Mark 3:29 (*whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin*) is not meant to be applied generally as the rejection of Jesus as Savior, but the rejection of the implications of the Kingdom's presence. The Beelzebul story (3:22ff.) offers a narrative transition for the parable of *the Sower* and a reason for Mark's use of the Isaiah 6 idolatry-taunt,[44] which is the natural consequence of the Beelzebul judgment-parable.[45]

But why blasphemy of the "Holy Spirit" and not blasphemy of God or His Messiah? First, the Beelzebul controversy is set in terms of the kingdom (*If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand*, 3:24)[46] with Jesus as the "stronger one" (cf. Isa 40:10) who comes to plunder Satan's *kingdom-house* (3:24, 27). Earlier John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the "mighty one" (*ho ischuroteros*; cf. 1:8; Isa 40:10) who is associated with God's Holy Spirit (1:8; 1:10). Second, there is an association to the first Exodus. The use of *ekballô (cast out)* in the Beelzebul narrative (*en tô archonti tôn daimoniôn ekballei ta daimonia*, *by the ruler of demons He casts out demons,* Mark 3:22, 23) connects the exorcism activities of Jesus to what God did to the inhabitants of the land. In the original Exodus story, God *will drive them out* [*ekballô*] until Israel possesses the land, delivering *the inhabitants of the land* into their hands so that Israel *will drive them out* [*ekballô*] (Exod 23:30-31, LXX).

Third, there is a link between the first Exodus, the Spirit, and "unforgiveness." In Exodus 23, *the Angel of the Lord* goes before them to guard them "along the way." Israel is warned to *obey his voice* and *not be rebellious toward him, for **he will not pardon your transgression**, since My name is*

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40   *Beelzebul* carries the meaning of exalted prince or ruler and is associated with Yahweh's rival deity, Baal, and as well, other foreign gods, often described as demons (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 120). By the time of Jesus, *Beelzebul* was the "prince of darkness" or Satan, or in a reference to a divided house, *zeboul* can also refer to the house of the god Baal. The reference to Beelzebul is also linked to the wider immediate Marken context, for it is also linked to the Canaanite storm god (cf. Mark 4:35ff.).

41   E.g., "Those who refuse Jesus, whom the Holy Spirit reveals, will not find forgiveness."

42   See Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 195ff.

43   The confrontation continues throughout Mark (7:1, 5; 8:31; 9:11, 14; 10:33; 11:18, 27; 12:13, 28, 32, 35-38; 14:1, 43, 53; 15:1, 31), including Pharisees as well (2:16, 18, 24; 3:6); cf. Mark 1:32; also see Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 173; Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 156.

44   Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 153.

45   There are similarities between the Beelzebul narrative and the pending Isa 6 judgment in Mark 4 (see Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 197): There is a contrast between *outsiders* and insiders (3:21, 31ff. / 4:10f.); there is a *kingdom* focus (3:24 / 4:11); there is warning of unforgiveness (3:29 / 4:12c).

46   Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 196.

in him (Exod 23:20-21). This is followed by warnings against idolatry (vv. 32-33; cf. Isa 6:9ff.; Mark 4:12ff.).[47] Additionally, elsewhere the Old Testament makes the connection between the Angel of Exodus and God's Spirit (cf. Haggai 2:5; Nehemiah 9:20). In Isaiah 63, we have a clear exodus motif connecting the Exodus-Angel, the Spirit, and the rebellion against "his voice" (cf. Exod 23:21):

> In all their affliction He was afflicted,
>   And the angel of His presence saved them;
>   In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them,
>   And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old.
> But they rebelled
>   And grieved His Holy Spirit;
>   Therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy,
>   He fought against them.
> Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses.
>   Where is He who brought them up out of the sea
>   with the shepherds of His flock?
>   Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the
>   midst of them (vv. 9-11).[48]

Zechariah 7 also pulls together the exodus, land-management stipulations, the role of the Spirit, and idolatry. Zechariah declares *the word of the LORD* (7:4)[49] to the exiles, for there is no attempt to show contrition, because they had not linked their idolatrous hearts to their misplaced social relationships:

> Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah saying, "Thus has the LORD of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.' But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing. They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts, "but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, for they made the pleasant land desolate" (Zech 7:8-14).

All the earmarks of the Beelzebul controversy are contained in Zechariah 7: The judgment of exile is analogous to judgment on idolatry and exile is related to breaking the covenant stipulations regarding the economically vulnerable and the poor.

The Beelzebul parable infers the charges that provoked the original idolatry taunt (Isa 6), which Mark uses to explain the Sower parable (*while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may not hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven*, Mark 4:11b-12; cf. Isa 6:9f.). Just as the Beelzebul conflict prepares the reader for the Mark 4 idolatry-taunt, Isaiah 1-5 prepared for the original in Isaiah 6; and, as the Beelzebul judgment is levied against Jerusalem's leadership, the same is reflected in the original Isaiah context, particularly the charge of idolatry (Isa 1:29-31; 2:6-9; 2:12-13; 2:18, 20). Amid the obvious immoral behavior,

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47   There is a strong connection between demons and idolatry, which links Jesus' ministry of exorcism and the charge of idolatry against the leaders of Israel (Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37; 1 Cor 10:20; cf. Jub. 1:11; 11:4-6; 1 En. 19:1; 99:7).

48   Note v 12, the reference to Moses dividing the waters (cf. Exod 12-14).

49   Note, *the word* draws the reader back to the Ten-Words (Exod 20:1ff.) and forward to the *Word* which is *the seed* in the parable of *the Sower who sows* (Mark 4).

there are charges related to land-management and the economically vulnerable—*Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow,* Isa 1:17; *They do not defend the orphan, Nor does the widow's plea come before them,* 1:23; T*he plunder of the poor is in your houses…And grinding the face of the poor,* 3:14-15. The mention of the vulnerable trio—the *orphan*, the *widow*, and the *alien*—is an obvious reflection of Exodus covenant stipulations (Exod 21-23). The original Isaiah context gives Mark's use significance and implications for the realm of discipleship and evangelism, particularly for social relationships involving the poor.

Preparing on 'The Way' for the "Sudden Appearance" at the Temple

As Mark prepares his reader/hearers for ultimate judgment on the temple (Mark 13), there is a thread of Old Testament referents and imagery that draws our attention back to covenant expectations. Embedded in this narrative are Old Testament texts that juxtapose the issues of idolatry and poverty. Mark begins this section with a reference to divorce (10:2ff.) and ends with the story of a poor widow (12:38ff.). The divorce reference reaches back to Deuteronomy 24, which more likely has to do with protecting women, widows, and orphans than a so-called "divorce exemption" for modern American Christians. This makes sense, given that Deuteronomy 24 also contains the gleaning codes designed to sustain the economically vulnerable trio—the *widow*, *orphan*, and *alien* (Deut 24:19ff.).

Jeremiah's temple speech (Mark 11:15ff.) forms the background to the confrontation in the Court of the Gentiles, where Jesus topples merchant tables and reproves the corrupted leadership that had allowed profane activity to invade the central symbol of Israel's faith (cf. Mark 11:17). In part, Jesus' words are drawn from Jeremiah 7:11. By using this source, Jesus gives them an Old Testament context, directing our attention back to the Exodus prohibitions against idolatry and stipulations regarding the poor:

> Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD." For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, "We are delivered!"—that you may do all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares the LORD (Jer 7:4-11).[50]

Similar to Isaiah's charges against Israel (1-5), outward appearances and rituals were all in place, but there was a misplaced trust that God would protect their religiosity despite neglecting covenant expectations toward the economically vulnerable and their disregard for justice (cf. Isaiah 56:1-7).

Mark 12 draws on the Isaiah 1-6 context, particularly the chapter 5 imagery of God's unproductive vineyard (Isa 5:2c). Just prior to the Isaiah 6 idolatry-taunt, there is Isaiah 5:7-8:

> For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel
>   And the men of Judah His delightful plant.

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50   Later, *The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to spite Me* (Jer 7:18). Also, the *fig tree* reference (Mark 11) partially derives from Jer 8:13, also having a close association with foreign idolatrous influences ("*I will surely snatch them away" declares the LORD; "there will be no grapes on the vine, and no figs on the fig tree, and the leaf will wither; and what I have given them will pass away*"). Furthermore, the Marken context includes the widow reference and "selling doves" as part of the description of the "buying and selling in the temple" (11:15) which also ties to the maltreatment of the poor through a reference to the Levitical provision given to the impoverished (*But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD …two turtledoves or two young pigeons…* (Lev 5:7).

> Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;
> For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.
> Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field,
> Until there is no more room,
> So that you have to live alone in the midst of the land![51]

Jesus' words reflect implications drawn from the original Isaiah parable and the contextual implications regarding the poor (Isa 1-5), idolatry (the taunt, Isa 6:9ff.), and judgment (exile).

Mark ends the thread with the ultimate disregard for covenant land-management expectations: oppression of a widow right there in the temple courts. The widow story carries associations to Exodus 22, Leviticus 19, 23, Deuteronomy 14-15, and Malachi 3—texts that juxtapose idolatry and the poor. Mark focuses on the abuse of a *poor widow*, whose only financial resources are stripped from her just so she can enter into the doomed temple.[52] The *poor widow* story, despite its common (mis)use as an illustration of sacrificial giving (to modern-day temples), is likely a capstone to the thread Mark has woven throughout his narrative, namely that the Gospel and the presence of the Kingdom are associated with social relationships, particularly toward the economically vulnerable. This is made even more clear as the listener encounters Jesus' *sudden* appearance in the temple, where the final judgment is foretold, drawing on the Malachi 3 threat, which, as well, juxtaposes idolatry and the neglect of the economically vulnerable (cf. Mal 3:5).

Idolatry: A Defective Social Construction of Reality

Mark's consistent references to Old Testament material that juxtaposes idolatry and the poor is certainly embedded into the very nature of the Gospel, suggesting that the Gospel is formative for social arrangements. Mark's highlighting of these Old Testament texts that juxtapose idolatry and expectations regarding the poor, as well, points to an apologetic and evangelistic potential for social action. Still, moving from ancient text *to* significance *to* application can be very difficult, especially as we consider how the application of such texts can include social action outcomes. At the risk of over-generalization, even Christian approaches to poverty tend to align with political views, party affiliations, and social-locations: Politically conservative Christians tend to read capitalism, free markets, and individual charity as biblical solutions to poverty; the politically liberal tend to read more public, state-centered solutions. Although both find some textual support, neither consider the biblical juxtaposition of idolatry and poverty, nor our own human capacity for idolatrous alignments in our own social-locations.

L. T. Johnson reminds us that "idolatry comes naturally to us, not only because of the societal symbols and structures we ingest from them, but also because it is the easiest way for our freedom to dispose itself."[53] Shifting the issue of poverty to the realm of discipleship and apologetics focuses our attention on the social-location of non-poor Christians and their relationship to the poor. In light of the Gospel framed by Mark, *non*-poor Christians should be mindful of the idolatries that can form their social reality, particularly those experiencing everyday life in places where poverty *is not* concentrated (i.e., non-urban life). It is not necessarily how Old Testament ethical texts apply to our modern social-location (although important) that is significant, but how the apologetic nature of the idolatry-poverty juxtaposition relates to those who are to be formed by the Gospel, then, how *that* significance dissuades Christians from conforming to any *private vs. public* dichotomous response to poverty.

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51   Cf. Micah 2:1-2.
52   Chip M. Anderson, "Widows in our Temple Courts (Mark 12:38-44): The Public Advocacy Role of the Local Congregation as Christian Discipleship" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society meeting, November 2006).
53   Luke T. Johnson, *Faith's Freedom: A Classic Spirituality for Contemporary Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 60.

Idolatry Promotes a Defective Social Reality for the Non-Poor Christian

The Old Testament story-line through narrative, singers, sages, and prophets is, for the most part, a story of the tension between Israel's faith and the presence and pressures of idolatry.[54] Craigie defines *idolatry* as the "worship of an idol or of a deity represented by an idol."[55] The Bible's range of terms for *idol* and *idolatry* allow the concept to mean both the worship of images and the worship of foreign gods, making both senses possible. The first direct prohibition against idolatry was associated with God's revelation of Himself to Israel, His *self-disclosure,* not through images, but words *and* the Sinai redemptive event, constituting a paradigm for God's continued self-disclosure (Exod 20).[56] God chose to make Himself known primarily through words rather than any other kind of form; the incomparability of the Lord renders all representative forms inadequate (cf. Deut 4:1-8; Isa 40:18, 25).[57] The severe exclusion of images (i.e., idols, symbols, and signs) or serving other gods was "to maintain a continuing consciousness among the Israelites that their God is different from and incomparable to the pagan gods" (cf. Isa 40:18-26).[58] Although much of Old Testament ethical content is similar to surrounding ANE religions, one of the striking contrasts to Israel's neighbors is not only the prohibition of idolatry, but in how idolatry formed social relationships.

In *Nature and Destiny of Man*, Reinhold Niebuhr observed that idolatry is making the contingent absolute, something relative into "the unconditional principle of meaning."[59] Johnson points out that, when we consider something as ultimate, this is worship, not just what our lips or cultus ritual render, but in the exercise of our freedom in service to that which we consider absolute and unconditional, and thus derive our significance. It is, however, not just an image fashioned with gold and silver that provides the danger of idolatry, for the Bible is clear, such idols are no-things (cf. Isa 41:21-24; 44:10; Pss 115; 135; Acts 14:15; 1 Cor 8:4; 10:19; Gal 4:8).[60] It is idolatrous when anything other than the biblical God is the object of such service and meaning.[61] Johnson reminds us that "important idolatries have always centered on those forces which have enough specious power to be truly counterfeit, and therefore truly be dangerous: sexuality (fertility), riches, and power (or glory)."[62] It is the body of knowledge that accompanies the object and service of worship and, then, the social and cultural habits that follow, developing an everyday "world," with meaning and definitions for relationships (repeated action, mundane habits), that objectifies reality and maintains significance and plausibility (its symbols and corresponding institutions). Our socially constructed world, then, is reality formed by our service of worship and sustained (validated) through the habits and experience of everyday life.

Idolatries are socially constructed and then objectified through routines of daily life, making "the relative absolute, the contingent necessary, and the end-all that which is neither end nor all."[63]

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54   J. G. Baldwin, "Idolatry," in *The New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed.; ed. J. D. Douglas et al; Wheaton: Tyndale, 1982), 503-505.

55   P. C. Craigie, "Idolatry," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Walter Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 542-543.

56   See Edward M. Curtis, "Idol, Idolatry," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday Image, 1992), 3:379; see Beale's introduction on the concept of idolatry in *We Become What We Worship*, 17ff.

57   Rosner, "The Concept of Idolatry."

58   Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 18-19.

59   Brian S. Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 176; Reinhold Niebuhr and Robin Lovin, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox , 1996), 1:178.

60   Idols in the later half of Isaiah frequently use the term "nothing" or one of its cognates. Similarly, Paul refers to idols as a thing that has no existence (1Cor 8:4), literally "an idol has no real existence" (RSV) or as the KJV translates, "an idol is nothing in the world." The Bible does not question the "existence" of idols, nor their significance in representing some*thing*; it is futility to trust in them that is at issue (cf. Isa. 41:21-24; 44:10).

61   "Idols only exist, in other words, in virtue of service. Since whatever is not God is contingent, that is not the necessary or sufficient cause of its own existence, it cannot give life but can only receive it" (Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981]: 46).

62   Johnson, *Sharing Possessions*, 52.

63   Ibid., 53.

The result is a distorted construction of reality for the Christian, whose whole orientation can be in conflict with the reality of the inaugurated presence and outcomes of the Kingdom. As far as biblical revelation is concerned, "Idolatry [is] the Big Lie about reality."[64] This is equally true of economic realities and social-locations that form everyday habits of non-poor Christians as it is for those who worship multiple gods or idols. This understanding of the function of idolatry is affirmed by Berger and Luckmann, who remind us *reality* itself *is socially constructed*.[65] However, to understand fully the non-poor's *everyday reality*, it is simply "not enough to understand the particular symbols or interaction patterns of individual situations." It is how the "overall structure or meaning" within "these particular patterns and symbols" are experienced. Seeking to apply the Gospel that is embedded with texts regarding idolatry and, as well, texts indicative of relationships toward the economically vulnerable, it is important to understand how the social-location experienced by many non-poor Christians was formed and its implications for their participation in the outcomes of this social-location.[66]

Religion once offered an integrating principle that helped provide a "life-world" that was "more or less unified."[67] But, modern life not only provides a less unified everyday life, now religion often aligns itself with the socio-economic forces that help sustain the plausibility of faith, which can then inoculate the non-poor Christian from the idolatrous forces embedded in their social-location. Over time new symbols and signs (lawns, yards, gated communities, commutes and highways, social status, shopping malls, upward mobility, the market, double-entry accounting, etc.)[68] that permeate the social-location the modern non-poor Christian experiences as everyday life *compete* with biblical symbols (e.g., the words of God, the cross, redemptive-historical acts of God in history). Johnson reminds us, "Prior to any action or pattern of actions we might term 'Christian' is a whole set of perceptions and attitudes, which themselves emerge from a coherent system of symbols, and an orientation toward the world and other humans, which we call Faith."[69] In fact the very habit of experiencing the fragmented, often unintegrated social-locations over and over everyday might feel like freedom bestowed by our socio-economic system, but actually weakens the plausibility of biblical faith to inform our *home world.* Non-poor Christians are in danger of idolatry when finding themselves in need of affirming "this worldly" system and its institutions as God-given in order to be *at home*, plotting their lives on *the societal map* provided by social institutions rather than biblical discipleship in order to relate—comfortably, plausibly, securely—to the overall web of acceptable meanings in society.[70] Because of the plurality of social worlds— work, school, play, third places, highways, commutes, home, shopping, church—in modern society, "the structures of each particular world are experienced as relatively unstable and unreliable."[71] The separated sectors of our social world are rationalized and relativized, forcing the non-poor Christian to justify religiously *this worldly* system and institutions in order to feel less exposed and vulnerable and more relevant and secure. After decades of political alignment and religious justification, for the most part, the non-poor Christians living in the suburbs now feel *at home*.

64   Johnson, *Faith's Freedom*, 61.
65   Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1966), 1.
66   Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 63-64.
67   Ibid., 64.
68   For exchanging symbols, particularly suburban *lawns*, see Robert Messia's essay, "Lawns as Artifacts: The Evolution of Social and Environmental Implications of Suburban Residential Land Use," in *Suburban Sprawl: Culture, Theory, and Politics* (ed. Matthew J. Lindstrom and Hugh Bartling; New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 69ff..; also Jon Pahl's *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces: Putting God in Place* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), particularly the chapter "Private Possessions: American Domestic Religion and the Suburban Household" (pp 103ff.); Peter Gardella, *Domestic Religion: Work, Food, Sex and Other Commitments* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 1f.
69   Johnson, *Sharing Possessions*, 31.
70   Berger, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*, 76.
71   Ibid., 77.

A Duplicitous, Self-Righteous Double Standard in the "Burbs"

Often, the non-poor Christians respond to the poor as those living in a socially constructed reality that is mostly alienated from those living with the effects of poverty. The non-poor Christian's participation in non-urban life causes a need for continuous reaffirmation of a biblical plausibility for their social-location, which alienates rather than connects them to the economically vulnerable.[72] Without a *sociological imagination*, many non-poor Christians are not fully aware of their own socially constructed exurban reality, nor how it has been formed, which can lead to duplicitous, self-righteous double standards toward the poor.

Often arguments rest, not on biblical grounds, but realities constructed by everyday life outside concentrated areas of poverty, namely the ability of the non-poor who have taken the "opportunities" presented in our socio-economic system to develop wealth and prosperity. The poor in the cities only need to do the same. Equal opportunity, not equal distribution of wealth is just, they reason. But this is not a fair picture, for the so-called "opportunity" has had a history and an opportunity that has been largely absent from social-locations with the most concentrated poverty, a consequence that is more akin to the injustice described by the prophets than simply the results of a good Christian work ethic and *the invisible hand* of the market.[73] The exurban non-poor benefit from histories and institutions that have developed in favor of the suburbs and, for the most part, at the expense of central-cities—for decades. The shift from urban to suburban came with an intentional redistribution of efforts and transactions ranging from Federal subsidies to government policies to perceptions of urban and exurban life.[74] The ability to enjoy prosperity today, especially in upwardly mobile exurbia, is built on socio-economic transactions that have contributed to the current socially constructed reality of many non-poor.

Since the end of WWII suburban development has been "celebrated," while urban decline was often "explained away as inevitable." The "industrial cities' obsolescence" and the flourishing of the suburban way of life, for many, has been "a sign of progress" rather than "a national defect," even necessary for continued economic growth.[75] Young married couples were "confident enough of the future to flee apartments in the cities for homes with mortgages in the suburbs," while at the same time "the industrial cities were undergoing precipitous decline."[76] Urban-centers, along with their infrastructures and economies, were failing and residents who could afford to do so left for the suburbs in great numbers. The industry clusters, particularly manufacturing that supported much of the urban population, closed up and left for "more favorable locations." Jobs left the central cities *en mass* and there was negligible workforce and corresponding educational development supportive of those who could not afford to leave.[77] Urban-municipalities became overly burdened with a dwindling tax-base and an ever-increasing demand for services. The shift toward exurbia was not simply "an inevitable evolution or a historical accident," but "the direct result of a number of policies that conspired powerfully to

72   Lindstrom and Bartling, eds., *Suburban Sprawl*, xiiff.

73   For idolizing *the market* see James Halteman, "The Market System, the Poor, and Economic Theory" in *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America* (ed. David P. Gushee; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 72-111.

74   For a review of the social impact on the shift to exurban sprawl and urban decline see L. Savage and M. Lapping, "Sprawl and Its Discontents: The Rural Dimension," *Suburban Sprawl*, 9f.

75   Robert A. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006), 5; also, Beauregard points out that post-1950s "housing and employment opportunities outside the cities, coupled with recognition of spreading blight, rising minority presence, and the deepening fiscal difficulties of city governments, further inflamed public ambivalence toward living in cities" (*When America Became Suburban*, 23); also see Ronald Hayduk, "Race and Suburban Sprawl," *Suburban Sprawl*, 144f.

76   Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 1-2.

77   Stephen V. Monsma, "Poverty, Civil Society and the Public Policy Impasse," in *Toward a Just and Caring Society*, 48; also see William Julius Wilson's *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

encounter urban dispersal,"[78] which would create two almost alien segments of society, with two distinctively estranged realities (i.e., habits of everyday life).

Furthermore, current upwardly mobile non-poor who live outside central-cities are the beneficiaries of a change in how home ownership was made possible. Even before WWII, Federal regulations began to restructure the home buying process to allow for lower down-payments and longer term-mortgages. The principle of amortizing loans made it possible to borrow on longer lengths of time for more affordable, smaller monthly payments. Later, after WWII, other Federal Housing Authority policies helped to structure home ownership to be very attractive and easier to obtain, crafting regulatory guidelines for subdivisions on the outskirts of urban centers, the first fruits of what was to become suburbs. In effect, the government, through legislation and acts of congress (the FHA and Veterans Administration in particular), disproportionately encouraged new home ownership in the suburbs rather than fixing or rehabilitating older structures in urban centers.[79]

The sociological pressures resulting from the end of WWII, the "released pent-up demand for starting families and buying consumer goods," a housing shortage in the central cities, the availability of low-cost mortgages for new homes, the mortgage-interest tax credit, mass production techniques in the housing industry all contributed to a rapid expansion of the suburbs. The shift in regulatory policies for long-term-little-down mortgages, government subsidized development of major highways for access in and out of central-cities, the GI Bill (a government funded education/training program), and other Federal aid to the newer exurban regions made prosperity possible as we know it today.[80] Zoning laws and affluent developers, not just *the invisible hand* of the market, protected the preferences of those with power. Furthermore, advertisers of home-related products, women's magazines, the FHA, and bank officials all sought to make "the sharpest possible contrast between the private, comfortable, safe, and protected environment of the suburbs and the open, competitive, dangerous, and seductive world of the central city."[81]

The *invisible hand* had and continues to get help—sometimes through Federal, State, and municipal efforts; sometimes through creative marketing; sometimes through celebrity-trend makers; sometimes by politically empowered zoning codes.[82] Growth and decline, expansion and contraction, growth in one area at the expense of another area—all unavoidable within a socio-economic system that prizes "progress," supported by desire for upward-mobility (and, too often, greed), promote the ultimate goal of "the Suburban Way of Life." It is an empirical fact, *the system* and its mediating institutions ignored its central-cities and promoted life in the "burbs" as the ultimate goal of prosperity, all for the gods of growth, progress, and the new.[83]

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78   Andres Duany, Jeff Speck, and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk Duany, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point, 2000), 8; see also Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 28; Lindstrom, *Suburban Sprawl*, xiv.

79   "Intentionally or not, the FHA and VA programs discouraged the renovation of existing housing stock, while turning their back on the construction of row houses, mixed-use buildings, and other urban housing types" (Duany, *Suburban Nation*, 8).

80   Track housing mirrored the techniques developed by the Armed Forces during WWII, keeping building costs low and making the move away from urban centers more affordable. Highways were almost 90% federally funded (Duany, *Suburban Nation*, 8). See Ronald Hayduk, "Race and Suburban Sprawl: Regionalism and Structural Racism," in *Suburban Sprawl*, 138f.

81   Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 77-78; Beauregard references Gerald E. Frug in *City Making: Building Communities without Building Walls* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 155.

82   "While government programs for housing and highway promoted sprawl, the planning profession, worshipping at the altar of zoning, worked to make it the law" (Duany, *Suburban Nation*, 9).

83   See Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 9f.

Conclusion: Social Action as Christian Apologetics

Simply, affluent suburbanites, despite a claim to a higher work ethic or a more developed sense of responsibility, didn't do it on their own; they had help along the way. On the one hand, the non-poor's social construction of reality, which they now experience as everyday life, allows them to benefit, not just from the market, but also from past actions of government that laid much of the groundwork for continued prosperity. On the other hand, the concentration of poverty in central-cities is not simply about laziness, slothfulness, or even personal sin. (I assume the non-poor who benefit from the current structure and mediating institutions are just as much "sinners" as those living in geographic areas of concentrated poverty.) Indeed, much of what is in place and experienced now as normal arose from various forms of racism and redlining practices, as well as "the concentration of subsidized housing projects [that] destabilized and isolated the poor, while federal home-loan programs, targeting new construction exclusively, encouraged the deterioration and abandonment of urban housing."[84] The fact of poverty and the reality of those affected by it in the central-cities could not have happened any more effectively if it were actually planned and implemented with malice. Without the aid of government policies and subsidies, as well as municipally empowered zoning laws and discriminatory business policies, the foundation for exurban wealth in America might not have happened. Rather than lamenting this inequitable state of affairs, participants, including many non-poor believers, have been encouraged to rejoice in the "prudence" of such strategies and the institutions, capitalism and the "mythical" market that sustain them.[85] The modern, non-poor suburban dweller is the heir of such socially constructed forces.

The present model for socio-economic progress and prosperity objectifies the non-poor Christian's reality (i.e., "home world") through habits and experiences of everyday life that are incorporated into his or her belief system—seemingly validating the plausibility of personal faith. The problem for the non-poor Christian living in such a history and current social-location is that it provides only a partial reality through its defective social construction. The Bible warns of God's judgment upon those who create or maintain economic structures that benefit some and exclude others, that pave the way to prosperity for some and prolonged, generational poverty for others (cf. Exod 22-23; Lev 19, 24; Deut 15, 24; Jer 4-8, 16-17; 22; Ezek 17-18, 22; Amos 4:1ff.; Mic 2:1-2; Zech 7; Isa 5:7ff.). Unaware or in denial of their socially constructed world, the non-poor believer often can accept a world that is duplicitous, limiting the historic and current benefits of a socio-economic system to those the "market blessed."

Emil Brunner remarked, "For every civilization, for every period of history, it is true to say, 'show me what kind of gods you have, and I will tell you what kind of humanity you possess.'"[86] For the Christian and Christian community it is: *Show me what kind of association you have with those living with the effects of poverty, and I will tell you what kind of god you worship.* The reality of everyday life is that Suburban life and its enablers—the free market and human acts of power—are often at odds with the Gospel, especially a Gospel that has been formed by the idolatry-poverty juxtaposition. For the non-poor Christian, this is an idolatrous mode of living and does not offer a biblically defensible apologetic for the God revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

84 Duany, *Suburban Nation*, 154.
85 Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 9.
86 Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology (trans. O. Wyon; London: Lutterworth, 1947): 34.

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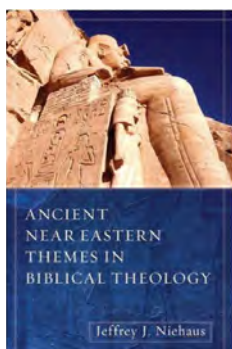
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Jeffrey J. Niehaus (Ph.D.) is Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and teaches at its Hamilton, Boston and Charlotte campuses.
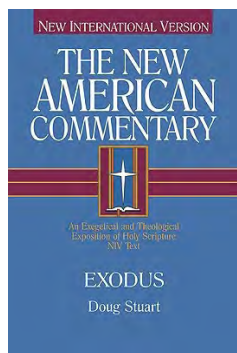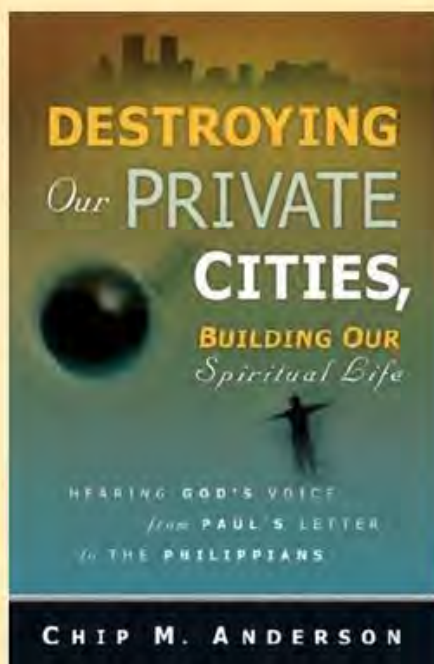

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CHIP M. ANDERSON

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Where is God in the Midst of the Suffering of Abuse?[1]

Steven Tracy

Introduction

The question, "Where is God in the midst of suffering caused by evil abuse?" is one of the most painful and personal questions imaginable. No doubt many readers have endured pain and suffering, and 100% of us *will*. Many of us have also experienced what can only be labeled "evil."

At the outset of this article, I'd like to acknowledge that I hardly consider myself an experiential expert on this subject. I haven't spent my adult life having reoccurring Post Traumatic Stress Disorder nightmares resulting from chronic childhood abuse; I don't live with intractable, debilitating physical pain caused by abuse damage; I haven't been gang raped, and I haven't lost loved ones due to genocide. But I work with many individuals who have had these experiences. In this article, I'd like to give articulation to their voices and to the voices of the writers of Scripture.

One of my first published book chapters was on this very subject of how a good and loving God could allow a world of evil and pain.[2] I wrote that as a talk just over a decade ago. Since then my wife was diagnosed with an incurable genetic disorder which has led to eighteen major surgeries; we began a Christian nonprofit to provide training and resources on abuse and healing;[3] our daughter moved to East Africa, where she lives in the slums of Kampala and cares for street boys and prostituted girls, 100% of whom have experienced horrendous abuse; we have worked for several years with rape and trauma survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the rape capital of the world, and I have been to Rwanda and seen the genocide sites. I have seen the shattered skulls of those slaughtered like dogs. I have spent time with individuals who watched their entire family slaughtered in front of their eyes.

In the past decade I have become more aware of my own inadequacy to answer why God allows a given act of evil, but I am more confident than ever before that a loving God is present and working powerfully in the midst of the most atrocious abuse and the most intense suffering.

The Problem

I'd like to restate and personalize the preceding question in the most basic, jarring fashion as it was articulated by a young woman I will call Mary, a woman I know well and love deeply. One day she came to me, filled with so much emotion she could barely contain it, and blurted out, "Where was God when my cousin was raping me? Where was he?" What did I as a Christian leader, as a theologian, say to Mary? What could I say?

Common Religious or Philosophical Responses

There are numerous ways people from varied religious traditions would answer Mary.

A. Reject the existence of a good God

Many atheistic philosophers argue that the presence of evil, abuse, and suffering give powerful evidence that God does not exist.[4] Some theists, on the other hand, maintain that evil and suffering

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are best explained not by denying God's existence, but by denying his goodness. For instance, Richard Rubenstein declares that the Holocaust has rendered the "Father-God" of traditional theology dead, yet he affirms the existence of a divine "Holy Nothingness" which is described as a "cannibal mother."[5] So these individuals might tell Mary something like this, "I'm sorry for what you've suffered. Your rape shows clearly that we are alone in the universe. There is no God, or if there is one, he (or it) isn't good and can't be trusted. You must heal yourself."

This model, however, goes against most people's innate sense of the universe. Often those who reject the existence of a good God end up arguing against this God in such a manner that their protest appears to be a very personal wrestling with a God they say they don't believe in. Nor can this model explain the hope filled, transformed lives of countless individuals who have experienced overwhelming pain and suffering.

B.   Reject or redefine evil and suffering

In some religious traditions, matter is understood to be illusory, and hence pain and evil are not real. So these individuals might tell Mary something like this, "I'm sorry for what you've suffered, but you need to understand that evil and pain are not real enemies to destroy you because they aren't real at all. They are merely an illusion. Your growth will come when you experience enlightenment, realizing that everything in the cosmos is the same, including what we often call 'good' and what we call 'evil'."[6]

This model cannot adequately account, however, for the universal, intractable presence of the "illusion" of pain and evil.

C.   Redefine God's goodness

Some deterministic religious traditions redefine goodness as whatever God does. They reason that, since God is good and everything that happens is caused by Him, what we call evil must actually be good. So these individuals might tell Mary something like this: "I realize the rape you experienced was traumatic and painful, but you must understand that you do not determine what is ultimately good or bad. God is utterly in control of the movement of every atom in the universe. So your rape was part of his predetermined, sovereign plan and it is thus good. To heal, you must correct your view of good and evil."[7]

This response, however, goes against most people's deepest moral intuitions. If we make the concept of "good" so elastic that it can encompass God causing rape, torture, and mass murder, then surely "good" is no longer a serviceable term to describe the painful world we live in.

D.   Reject or redefine God's power

Some religious traditions point to God himself as the reason evil exists—he is powerless to stop it. Rabbi Harold Kushner holds this position. Once God created the world, while he loves his creation, he cannot intervene to stop evil. Once the trigger has been pulled and the bullet is speeding down the barrel of the gun, God himself cannot stop it, "for God cannot intervene to stop

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eliminate evil as far as possible; there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do; evil exists). William Rowe modifies this argument by asserting that a good God would eliminate all pointless suffering, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philisophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335-41.

5 Richard Rubenstein, A*fter Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 198. See also Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), 42.

6 While there is complexity to the concept of evil in Eastern religion, this is essentially the Hundu understanding of evil and suffering. See, for instance, Stephen Kaplan, "Three Levels of Evil in Advaita Vedanta and a Holographic Analogy," in *Evil and the Response of World Religion*, ed. William Cenkner (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1997), 116-26.

7 Some staunch Calvinist theologians (many would label them "hyper Calvinists") hold this type of view. For instance, Gordon Clark states "I wish very frankly and pointedly to assert that if a man gets drunk and shoots his family, it was the will of God that he should do so," *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961), 221, cited in Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 442. Clark goes on to argue that since God is the cause of everything that happens in the universe, and whatever God does (causes) is good, then whatever happens is good.

the inexorable laws of nature."[8] So these individuals might tell Mary something like this, "I grieve for you and what you have suffered. More importantly, so does God. He hates it that you were raped but simply couldn't stop it from happening. So pray to him to give you comfort and strength in a world filled with abuse and suffering that neither you nor he can eliminate."

This model certainly takes suffering, evil, and God's goodness seriously. But, in denying God's power to stop evil and suffering, it seriously limits God's ability to redeem and overcome suffering and evil.

E.   Reject the concept of abuse "victim"

Some religious traditions, particularly Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, explain suffering in terms of the law of karma. Suffering is the result of bad karma from previous negative behavior, particularly in a previous life (reincarnation). Thus, we are ultimately responsible for the evil abuse and suffering we experience in the present because of our own past actions. Hence, those who suffer abuse are never really "victims." They are simply reaping what they have sown. From a Buddhist perspective,

> No suffering occurs that is not deserved, although the world is sufficiently opaque and our ignorance is sufficiently deep that we usually feel otherwise, and we feel justified, albeit wrongly, on protesting the suffering that happens to us on the grounds of our innocence. The law of karma, like the process of digestion in our bodies, does not require a god or any other agent to administer it. It is a causal process that is conceptualized on the analogy of other natural processes, and just as we become sick when we eat tainted food, so when we do an evil action we and we alone must suffer the results.[9]

So these individuals might tell Mary something like this, "I'm sorry you are so hurt and angry at your abuse, and you may not understand or be able to accept this right now, but ultimately you are not a victim. You must have done something in this life or a previous life to cause abuse and suffering to happen to you. You only add to your suffering when you try to live as if you were not subject to the law of karma. Accept this, enlighten yourself, and learn to let go of all desire. Then you will no longer suffer."[10]

The Best Explanation

The best answer to the question, "Where is God in the midst of the evil and resultant suffering of abuse?" is not found in a theoretical model but in a person—the person of Jesus Christ. I'd like to break this down in three ways in terms of what Jesus has done to address the evil and suffering of abuse.

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8 Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 118. Recent "open view" Christian theists somewhat move this direction in arguing that evil occurs because God is limited in how he can respond to evil. He cannot foresee the future and hence some evil occurs that he didn't know would occur. Most evil takes place because God chose to take risks when creating the universe. Thus, Gregory Boyd argues that we should view this world as one in which God is at war with evil, rather than one in which God controls evil. This cosmos is one which should be pictured as a vast society of free moral agents who have significant power to thwart God's will and inflict suffering. Satan is so powerful, in fact, that at first even Jesus could not cast out some demons, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 291; 141-2; 192-3.

9 Charles Hallisey, "Buddism," in *Evil and Suffering*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 58-59.

10 Ibid., 47. Sadly, all too often Christians grope to "explain" the suffering of abuse causally in terms of a victim's own sinful actions (in this life) which precipitated, and thus in some manner caused, the abuse. For instance, Beth Impson asserts that the woman is often partially responsible for date rape by dressing immodestly and by making poor choices (such as inviting her date to her dorm room), and thus she "may also be sinful, contributing to the man's desire to sin." Impson concludes that it is wrong to say the woman bears no responsibility for date rape and if we are going to be "helpful" to the woman we should hold her accountable for the way she "contributed" to the rape, *Called to Womanhood: The Biblical View for Today's World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 142-4. Similarly, often one of the first things naïve pastors sometimes ask a battered woman is "what did you do that made him so mad," implying that her actions in some manner caused the assault.

1. Jesus Came

If we simply start by looking around us at the pervasive amount of abuse and suffering, we naturally ask, "Where is God?" and "Why would he create a world like this?" Recently, I wrote a chapter for a new textbook on sexual abuse and surveyed the latest abuse prevalence rates.[11] They are very grim:

Forty percent of girls and thirteen percent of boys experience childhood sexual abuse.[12]

Sexual abuse among adolescent and young adult women has risen dramatically.[13] One recent general population study of women found that thirty-eight percent of all respondents reported at least one experience of sexual abuse in their lifetime, but for the women thirty-one years old and younger, almost forty-two percent reported sexual abuse.[14]

Alarmingly high sexual assault rates are also being seen among high school age adolescents. In one major study of dating violence, twenty percent of American high school girls report being physically or sexually assaulted by a male partner.[15]

Intimate partner violence is a particularly wide-spread problem. The National Violence against Women Survey reported that almost twenty-five percent of women and 7.6% of men were raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some time in their lifetime.[16]

Globally, the picture is even more disturbing. One major survey found that in Liberia's recent civil war, seventy-five percent of the women had been raped, most having been gang raped.[17] In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where we minister to trauma survivors, tens of thousands of women and children, and many men, are estimated to be raped annually in just one single eastern province, and in just over a decade over five million have died due to conflict related causes.[18]

There is far more abuse and resultant suffering in our world than most people can imagine. It is thus essential to recognize that, according to the Bible, God did not create a world of abuse and suffering. The creation account in Genesis shows God creating a perfect world with no sin, evil, death, or suffering. God made the first couple, Adam and Eve, and they reflected God's character and love in their relationship: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Gen 2:24-25).[19] It was only when sin entered the universe through human disobedience that the human race was plunged into death and suffering. In fact, after the first human sin in Genesis three, we find that, by Genesis four, humans are already committing fatal domestic violence

11 Steven R. Tracy, "Definitions and Prevalence Rates of Sexual Abuse: Quantifying, Explaining, and Facing a Dark Reality," in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming).

12 R. M. Bolen and M. Scannapieco, "Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse: A Corrective Meta-analysis," *Social Service Review* 73 (1999): 281–313. Other more recent studies of childhood sexual abuse rates for women have revealed prevalence rates from twenty-four to thirty-two percent: J. Briere and D. M. Elliott, "Prevalence and Psychological Sequelae of Self-Reported Childhood Physical and Sexual Abuse in a General Population Sample of Men and Women," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 27 (2003): 1205-22.

13 Erin A. Casey and Paula S. Nurius, "Trends in the Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence: A Cohort Analysis," *Violence and Victims* 21 (2006): 629–44.

14 Ibid., 635–7.

15 Jay G. Silverman et al., "Dating Violence against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Abuse, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286 (2001): 572–9.

16 P. Tjaden and N. Thoennes, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey* (Washington D.C.: Department of Justice, 2000).

17 Nicholas D. Kristof, "After Wars, Mass Rapes Persist," *New York Times*, May 21, 2009.

18 Jeffrey Gettleman, "Rape Epidemic Raises Trauma of Congo War," *New York Times*, October 7, 2007; Nicholas D. Kristof, "The World Capital of Killing," *New York Times*, February 7, 2010; "Sexual Violence Increasing in Democratic Republic of the Congo," *The Lancet* 371 (2008): 15-16.

19 Unless otherwise stated, Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*.

(in this case brother killing brother). Just a couple chapters later, physical violence has spread to the entire human race (Gen 6:13). This was not God's plan, but a corruption brought about by human sin. Scripture tells us that our world is out of order; things are not "the way they are supposed to be." Scripture not only attributes this disorder and suffering to human sin, but to spiritual, demonic forces. In Scripture, Satan is called "Apollyon," the "destroyer" who promotes abuse and suffering (Rev 9:11). Yet God does not sit back passively while abuse maims and harms families, children, men, and women of every nation in every period of history. Rather, Jesus came to earth to bring healing, forgiveness, and victory over sin and evil.

Unlike the impassive gods of the Greeks and Romans who cavorted on Mt. Olympus with the nymphs, drinking ambrosia while people on earth suffered, the Bible tells us that Jesus, the Divine Son of God, voluntarily chose to take on human flesh and enter the vortex of human suffering, abuse, and evil. Furthermore, Jesus came into the world in the most humble, weak, and vulnerable manner imaginable. Philip Yancey describes well the shocking manner of Jesus earthly incarnation:

> The God who came to earth came not in a raging whirlwind nor in a devouring fire. Unimaginably, the Maker of all things shrank down, down, down, so small as to become an ovum, a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager…The God who roared, who could order armies and empires about like pawns on a chessboard, this God emerged in Palestine as a baby who could not speak or eat solid food or control his bladder, who depended on a teenager for shelter, food, and love.[20]

Some of the greatest torments of abuse survivors are their feelings of shame, vulnerability, and isolation. This makes Jesus' humble earthly incarnation an incredibly powerful redemptive event to abuse survivors. In Matthew 1:23, which describes Jesus' advent, he is called "Immanuel," which means "God with us." Where is God in a world of abuse and suffering? He is here with us—Jesus came.

2. Jesus Died[21]

The prophet Isaiah declared that Christ would be a man of sorrows who, because of experiencing abuse, would be well acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3-5). Thus, Christ personally understands the horrors of abuse. He was verbally abused, mocked, slapped, beaten, spit on, violated (publicly stripped and hung naked), shamed, tortured to death, and experienced a hideous sense of separation from God the Father. Christ understands what abuse victims suffer because he was abused. Amazingly, he did so voluntarily that he might deliver sinners from death. Thus, abuse survivors can look to Christ for mercy and grace. He understands, cares, and relates to the pain of abuse. This truth is often overlooked by abuse survivors, but it is extremely helpful.

Corrie Ten Boom was a young Dutch Christian who was imprisoned by the Nazis because her family had sheltered Jews. She and her sister Betsy were eventually shipped to Ravensbruck, a Nazi death camp. Corrie recounts the humiliation of regular "medical inspections" in which she and the other prisoners were forced to strip naked and walk slowly, single file, past a "phalanx of grinning guards." In the middle of one of these abusive ordeals, God brought to her mind the precious truth that her savior was crucified naked. He personally understood the abuse she was suffering.[22] This gave her great strength and comfort.

Jessica is a woman my wife Celestia and I have been blessed to come to know this year. Jessica's childhood sexual abuse created tremendous internal damage that made her vulnerable

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20 Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 36.
21 Portions of the sections of this paper dealing with "Jesus Died" and "Jesus Rose" are drawn from Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 175-8.
22 Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1971), 196-7.

to exploitation. As an adolescent, she was approached and wooed by an older man who turned out to be a pimp. Jessica thought he loved her. He manipulated her into what turned out to be a three year descent into the hell of prostitution. The first "john" paid her (as a vulnerable teenage girl) essentially to rape her, stole her purse, and ran over her with his car when he finished with her. Jessica has suffered more than most of us can imagine. So I asked her a few days ago how she would answer the question, "where is God in a world of abuse and suffering?" Her answer is insightful and poignant, "God is in the same place He was when I was being raped and beaten as He was when his Son was hanging on the cross." Several years ago, Jessica began to read the Bible and discovered that Jesus loves the world and gave particular care to the broken and marginalized, such as prostitutes. Jessica came to understand that Jesus came to die for the world so that we might be freed from the bondage and power of sin, including abuse. In other words, Jesus entered our suffering, abusive world for a very specific purpose. Paul, writer of much of the New Testament, put it this way: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Thus, we now have an answer to Elie Wiesel's haunting question, posed as he watched a young boy slowly choke to death in a Nazi death camp: "Where is God now?"[23] The answer is that God is on the cross. The cross does not answer all of our questions about human suffering, but it assures us of God's active compassion for human misery. As the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was eventually murdered by the Nazis, wrote from his prison cell, "only the suffering God can help."[24] In the cross of Christ, we see a suffering God who can help those who suffer evil and abuse.

3. Jesus Rose

The message of Christianity is that Jesus not only came and died but rose again on the third day. This is the greatest miracle in human history. It assures us that there is life after death and hope when abuse has stripped away all hope. It also assures us that there will ultimately be justice for abuse survivors.

For abuse victims, it feels as if evil has won and hope is lost. But Scripture declares that, through his death on the cross, Christ broke the back of Satan and triumphed over evil. Paul tells the Colossians, regarding the crucifixion of Christ, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities [demonic spirits], He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col 2:15, NASV). In Greek, this is language of a triumphal military procession in which the defeated enemy is forced to march through the streets. In other words, through the cross, the demonic forces have been defeated and publicly humiliated. John makes a similar claim about the power of the cross over Satan: "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). But our challenge is that, from a New Testament perspective, while the cross marks the beginning of the end for Satan and his demonic legions, the final triumph of God over evil is yet to come. But the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ assure us that the final triumph over evil will come. Through the cross, it has already begun.

What is most amazing is that God used evil itself (the abuse of the Son of God by crucifixion) to triumph over evil. Henri Blocher states:

> Evil is conquered as evil because God turns it back upon itself. He makes the supreme crime, the murder of the only righteous person, the very operation that abolishes sin. The manoeuvre is utterly unprecedented. No more complete victory could be imagined. God responds in the indirect way that is perfectly suited to the ambiguity of evil. He entraps the deceiver in his own wiles. Evil, like a judoist, takes advantage of the power of good, which it perverts; the Lord, like a supreme champion, replies by using

23 Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1960), 61-62.
24 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition* (London: SCM, 1953), 361; see also Charles Ohlrich, *The Suffering God: Hope and Comfort for Those Who Hurt* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982).

the very grip of the opponent...It is exactly this, the sin of sins, the murder of the Son, which accomplishes this work.[25]

Thus, in the greatest reversal in the history of the world, in the cross of Christ, evil and abuse were used to secure the utter defeat of evil and abuse. We can now see why the cross was of such singular importance for the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 2:2). The cross demonstrates God's mercy. It connects Christ with human suffering. It broke the back of Satan. It spells the eternal defeat of evil.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with the voices of some courageous abuse survivors. Other than Mary and David, the rest of the voices below are from former Ugandan street children our daughter Abby has, by God's grace, been able to redeem from the streets and bring into her residential home in Kampala. All of the children they minister to have experienced extreme abuse and suffering, often including disfiguring beatings, life threatening assaults, rape, and forced prostitution. David Kakeeto is a young Ugandan man who ministers full time in the slums of Kampala to street children, homeless youth, and severely handicapped adults.

Mary: When I look back on my journey, it is hard to believe that I am the same person I was a few years ago. Last year, I finished graduate school and now serve as a social worker to homeless and impoverished families. I recently married an amazing Christian man, and all of my anger and bitterness toward God has been replaced by a sweet, sincere relationship with him. I now view God as my redeemer and rescuer. Hearing songs such as "Amazing Grace" never fails to bring tears to my eyes. I have turned my energy towards helping needy women and children, many of whom are abuse victims. I feel that I can help them on a level that someone who has not been abused could not, because I can literally step into their shoes. I will never cease to be amazed by the way God uses evil for good if we let him.

Monday: "All problems come in life, but, if you hold onto the Lord, a time will come when he will set you free."

[When Abby rescued Monday he was dying and was literally sprawled out in the mud, with people stepping on top of him. Abby says he has experienced more pain and trauma than any child she has ever known.]

Emmanuel: "There is no problem that is permanent. In my life, I've been through troubles and many challenges, and, as time went on, those troubles became more and more bearable until I was able to overcome with God's help."

Muwonge: The reason why there is suffering in the world is because the devil knows as long as he can bring troubles and problems to people that it will be hard for them to believe in God because some will understand it to be God's abandonment of them. His word of encouragement is to believe because only a lot of faith can bring them through.

David Kakeeto: I felt closest to the Lord when I was on the streets and had nothing, because He was my only place to run to. For 1 1/2 years, I slept with no roof and woke up and had no food or way to get it, but every single day God provided. I really believe that God is everywhere, even in traumatic situations. God is even closer when we suffer, because our heart is opened up. We don't want problems in our life as humans, but, whether we like it or not, problems are good at increasing our faith, because it makes us need God. I don't want to lack basic needs in my life, but it was when I had nothing that I was closest to God. Problems prove to us that we are inadequate and only God can save us. In a problematic world, people can learn to trust in God

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25 *Evil and the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 132.

even more. "A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all" (Ps 34:19).

Steven Tracy teaches at Phoenix Seminary as professor of theology and ethics and is founder and executive director of Mending the Soul Ministries, a Christian abuse resource ministry which he founded with his wife Celestia. He has authored several books, most with Celestia, including *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse*; *Marriage at the Crossroads*; and *Our Lost Princesses: A Community Based Guide for Caregivers of Prostituted Girls* (forthcoming).
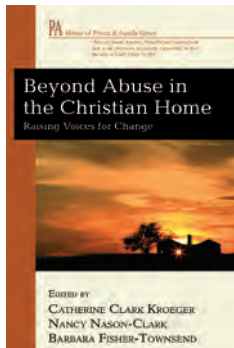
Beyond Abuse in the Christian Home: Raising Voices for Change presents an accurate, faith-based analysis of abuse in the Christian family context. As it provides resources to deal with this problem, the contributors come from various faith traditions, work in different contexts, and see the issue in part based on their own narrative and training. Yet, despite their differences, they are unanimous that violence has no place in the home.

Dr. Catherine Kroeger is Ranked Adjunct Professor of Classical and Ministry Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and frequently teaches at CUME.
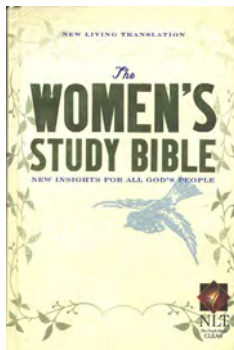
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Review of *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* by Dennis Hollinger (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009)

Maria L. Boccia

Dennis Hollinger, president and professor of Christian ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has written a book exploring Christian sexual ethics which goes well beyond the hot issues of homosexuality and sex outside of marriage. There have been many fine books by Christian scholars addressing the issue of sexuality. President Hollinger's unique contribution comes from his ability to provide solid foundations in understanding the relationship between one's worldview and sex and to speak to the contemporary context of Christians living in twenty-first century America.

After an introductory chapter, his book is divided into two parts. The introductory chapter addresses the "so what" question. He notes that we live in a sex-saturated culture, where we are constantly bombarded with sexual images and messages, speaking in a thousand different voices which would confuse anyone not holding clear beliefs about sexuality. In contrast, Dennis Hollinger argues that there is inherent meaning to sex, and we find fulfillment when we respect that meaning. His thesis is that sex is a good gift from God, given for specific purposes to be fulfilled in the specific context of the marriage between a man and woman. He is clear about the perspective from which he writes: a Christian worldview grounded in the assumption of the biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. He does not expect the ethical positions he puts forth in the remainder of the book to be popular, but he is more concerned with being faithful than being popular.

The first part of the book, entitled "frameworks," is composed of four chapters which lay the groundwork for asking specific questions about sexuality. In separate chapters, he covers ethical theories deriving from philosophy, worldviews, the Christian worldview specifically, and his understanding of the purposes of sex derived from his study of the Bible. In the worldview chapter, Hollinger provides a very readable introduction to the major models of ethical theory, including consequential theories such as utilitarianism and principal ethics. In this context he provides valuable critique both philosophically and biblically, without losing the educated lay reader in technical jargon. In the chapter on worldviews, Hollinger again reviews the different worldviews such as asceticism, humanism, and naturalism, providing biblical critique while avoiding technical jargon that would lose the educated lay reader.

In reviewing a Christian worldview, Hollinger explores sexuality in the context of the great themes of Scripture, presenting the ideal while not shying away from discussing the distortions following the fall. Hollinger notes that the image of God is human beings as male and female. With other scholars, he sees the relational and sexual capacity of men and women as an aspect of that image. He emphasizes that our sexuality means that we are created in a twofold way, without any hierarchy. He notes that there is an equal sharing of God's image, and that the Hebrew word *ezer*, meaning helper, did not convey any sign of inferiority. He notes that it is the distortions of the fall that caused the abuse of power and domination of men over women. Interestingly, unlike other books of Christian sexual ethics that I have read, Hollinger includes in his discussion of the distortions of the fall the physiological and genetic disorders which can affect our sexuality.

He ends this section with a chapter summarizing a positive statement of the purposes of sex. He provides a counterpoint to the biblical teachings with what we can learn from natural revelation about these purposes. He recognizes that the four main reasons God designed sexual intimacy include consummation of marriage, procreation, love, and pleasure.

With this framework in mind, Hollinger then moves on to discuss specific topics related to

sexual ethics in part 2, dedicating a chapter to each of the following: sex before marriage, sex and marriage, homosexuality, reproductive technology, and a final chapter addressing how a Christian should live in the context of these cultural issues and challenges. In each of these chapters, he addresses the contemporary situation, citing statistics about contemporary sexual behavior and attitudes, critiquing them from a biblical perspective grounded in the worldview he set up in part one. Hollinger is conservative in the positions he takes and does an excellent job outlining the more liberal interpretations of Scripture which attempt to accommodate the contemporary moralities, presenting his case for why they are not valid. In his chapter on homosexuality, Hollinger demonstrates particularly clearly his ability to present his clear arguments for why homosexual behavior is unacceptable, while also expressing concern and compassion for those who experience homosexual attraction. Unlike many other books on this topic, Hollinger includes a discussion of reproductive technologies, perhaps reflecting his involvement with the broader bioethics community for which this is an area of lively debate. In all of these chapters, I particularly appreciate the balance he achieves in covering both principles for guiding our choices with addressing very specific topics, such as oral sex and masturbation. While I do not entirely agree with every conclusion he draws about each of these topics, I found his book thought-provoking and helpful.

Finally, Hollinger writes with a pastor's heart. He is concerned about how the changing norms in our contemporary culture are affecting our sexual behavior and thinking. He recognizes that "what is at stake is the integrity of our personal being, the hope of our marriages, the well-being of our children, the authenticity of the church, and the fabric of society" (19).

Maria L. Boccia, Ph.D., D.Min. is a marriage and family therapist and certified sex therapist with experience in the diagnosis and treatment of a range of sexual disorders. She is the Director of Graduate Programs in Counseling and Professor of Pastoral Counseling and Psychology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary – Charlotte, and maintains a private practice in the Steele Creek area of Charlotte. Dr. Boccia brings to her clinical work the experience of over 20 years of biomedical research on attachment and the long-term emotional and physiological consequences of early loss, most recently at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she focused on the role of oxytocin in these processes. Dr. Boccia is credentialed as an LPC, LMFT, and an AASECT-certified sex therapist and is also certified by the American Board of Christian Sex Therapists.

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Review of *Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church* by Christine A. Colón and Bonnie E. Field (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009)

Megan K. DeFranza

In *Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church,* Christine A. Colón and Bonnie E. Field address many of the unintended consequences of Evangelicalism's emphasis on the family. While speaking about celibacy—the choice not to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage—the book is addressed to Evangelicals more broadly, to reassess how we talk and think about marriage, singleness, sexuality, and community. Written in an accessible style for an adult readership, the chapters are meaty enough for the college or seminary classroom.

Despite the fact that "singles make up approximately 50% of American adults [and]… approximately 50% of adults who say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ… singles are [38-50%] less likely to attend church than those who are married"(79). While some might chalk this up to the selfishness of 20-somethings who would rather sleep in than participate in church, Colón and Field argue that the issue is much more complex and that evangelical teaching is also to blame in keeping singles out of the pews. For when marriage is presented as the path to personal and spiritual maturity, singles, especially older adult singles are left out, "singled out," relegated to permanent spiritual adolescence, regarded as second-class citizens in the church at best, and sexual temptations for the married at worst.

The authors pay particular attention to older singles, because they believe these have fallen through the cracks in our fellowship halls as well as our theology. They argue that most Christian books on singleness focus on teenagers and young twenties with the simple message of "waiting" but fail to deal with the complexities of older, adult singles who are beginning to ask if their waiting has been in vain.

The book opens with analyses of negative and positive views of celibacy in the secular media as well as in the church. From an observation by the director of *Gilmore Girls*, who insisted "Having sex at 19 doesn't make you a bad girl . . . It makes you a human being" (27), they argue that, while many Evangelicals would insist that unmarried sex at nineteen *does* make one a bad girl, nevertheless, Evangelicals often, unwittingly, affirm the latter half of the quote in the way they treat singles as less than fully human, or not yet adults.

Part 2 functions as a handy annotated bibliography—the best and the worst of Christian dating guides and evangelical teaching on marriage and singleness. Our authors highlight a number of "dangerous messages" found in these sources, especially the messages that sexual temptation cannot be resisted, so Christians must avoid it altogether (100) or marry early (109). In contrast to these messages, they argue that Christian maturity requires all believers to learn to resist sexual temptation, not simply through avoidance of the other sex—a practice which ultimately destroys Christian community—but through spiritual discipline.

Field and Colón also highlight "Dangerous Messages about Sex and Marriage" that lurk subtly and not so subtly in much material about waiting for a Christian mate: 1) Great marital sex is the reward of being chaste, 2) Sex is sacred and necessary for spiritual maturity, 3) You have the right to be happy, and you must be married in order to be happy, and 4) Marriage is God's primary institution on earth. They counter, "Throughout history, many good, God-fearing individuals have not been granted the spouse they longed for. Are we really to conclude from this evidence that God was punishing them for spiritual immaturity or lack of faith? Or are we to conclude that God's love and favor simply didn't extend to them? What does it say about our theology if a romantic marriage and mind-blowing sex are seemingly the supreme evidence of God's favor? By promoting

ideas about sex and marriage that imply they are the rewards for serving God, the evangelical church is not only making singleness more difficult for Christian singles to accept but also creating a skewed perception of God" (126).

In sincere attempts to counteract the secular message that sex is an animal instinct that cannot be controlled, Christians have over-emphasized the sacredness of sex and marital union as a symbol of Christ's union with the church (see Eph. 5). What many have not recognized are the unintended consequences that follow from focusing on this one metaphor over all others: "When marriage is seen as our primary goal and the solution to all of our problems, and when sex is equated with experiencing the divine, is it any wonder so many people in the church are dissatisfied with their marriages?" (130). Such teaching is damaging to married persons but is especially troublesome for singles, who, according to these messages, cannot fully experience union with God because they are not married and not engaged in conjugal sexuality.

In Part 3, our authors look for better ways to address celibacy by mining the Scriptures and the history of the Christian tradition: "While it may be difficult to see in the midst of an often marriage-obsessed evangelical culture, scripture … places family values in subordination to the church and its mission here on earth" (150). This is old news to Roman Catholic Christians and yet this does not lead these evangelical authors to the Roman Catholic elevation of celibacy as a higher calling. Rather than choose which is better, we must, with Scripture, affirm a both/and (151).

What they are striving for is a redefinition, or at least recognition, of another form of celibacy, a celibacy that bridges those actively waiting for a spouse and those committed to a lifetime of Christian singleness for service to God. This celibacy is "being called by God to live chaste lives as strong, single Christians for as long as he desires us to fulfill this role" (209).

Like many of the authors they quote, Colón and Field draw upon a distinction made by the late theologian Stanley Grenz in order to affirm that celibate persons are still sexual, even if they do not engage in genital sexual activity. Quoting Grenz (*Sexual Ethics*), they argue that sexuality is part of being human, because humans are male and female. According to Grenz, "Sexuality… provides us with our drive to connect with others … This need to find fulfillment beyond ourselves is the dynamic that leads to the desire to develop relationships with others and ultimately with God" (213). They also quote Ronald Rolheiser (*The Holy Longing*), on a similar note, who writes, "In its maturity, sexuality is about giving oneself over to community, friendship, family, service, creativity, humor, delight, and martyrdom so that, with God, we can help bring life into the world.' …Celibates, then, are not forced to repress our sexuality because we refuse to have sex. Instead, we are challenged to enact our sexuality in other ways to glorify God" (214).

While there is a rich Christian tradition which draws upon the marital union between the mystic and God, it may be counter-productive to view the drive for human community as the sexual drive, or "social sexuality." It undermines the very work our authors have done to lay the groundwork for healthy relationships between non-married persons, relationships that can be life-giving and holy precisely because they are non-sexual. Our authors do well to point out that the highest need of singles is not sex but community (216-217). This is the restlessness of which Augustine spoke, when he said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." While unfulfilled sexuality does create a restlessness that can drive us to others and to God, we need not envision these relationships as an outworking of "social" sexuality. Most Christians throughout history have simply called this love, our need for love. For some of us, Christian love will be expressed sexually, but with only one other person in the world, our spouse. Every other relationship, for the married and unmarried alike, must be based on non-sexual love, the sacrificial love of Christ. It is Christ's love which transforms sexual love, not (non-genital) sexual love that creates Christian community.

Their discussion of the priority of community is important, and yet it seems to suggest that

(genital) sexual drives will somehow be fulfilled if only singles will find community. Both married and non-married persons must live with sexual drives that are often unfulfilled. These remain even when otherwise healthy marriages and healthy communities are in place. What is problematic is when we mistake the sex drive for our drive for community and vice versa. Keeping these categories separate, and calling for spiritual discipline as our authors do, seems the wisest course.

The authors close with practical suggestions for building Christian communities that embrace and support both singles and married persons. Their counseling provides a breath of fresh air, cool-headed wisdom cutting through the heat of our sex-crazed society and paving the way for the possibility of true Christian community, where men and women care for one another without fear and work together to advance God's kingdom.

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The **Cat** & the **Toaster**

Living System Ministry in a Technological Age
Douglas A. Hall with Judy Hall & Steve Daman

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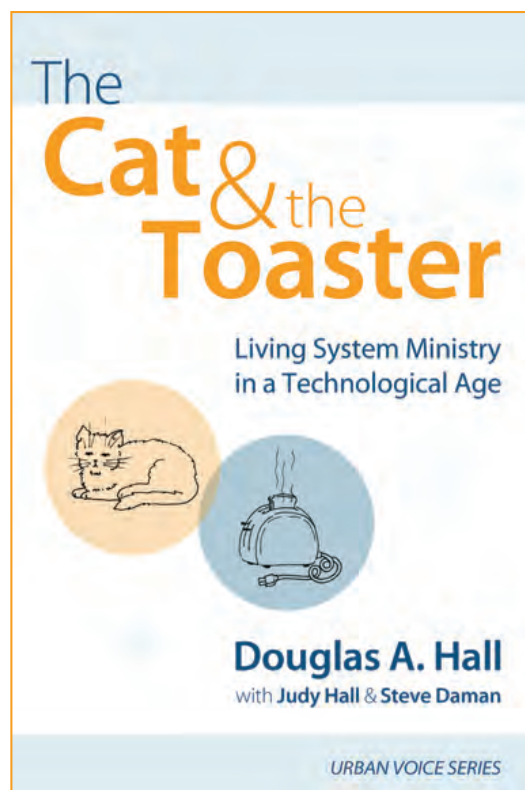
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Douglas A. Hall is the President of the Emmanuel Gospel Center in Boston (www.egc.org), where he has served with his wife, Judy Hall, since 1964. He is also an adjunct professor of urban ministry with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Review of *Beyond Abuse in the Christian Home: Raising Voices for Change* edited By Catherine Clark Kroeger, Nancy Nason-Clark, and Barbara Fisher-Townsend (House of Prisca and Aquila Series, Wipf and Stock, 2008)

LESLIE MCKINNEY

Beyond Abuse in the Christian Home, Raising Voices for Change is a dream of Catherine Clark Kroeger, brought to completion by the editing of Nancy Nason-Clark and Barbara Fisher-Townsend. Catherine Clark Kroeger, Ph. D., is a ranked adjunct professor of classical and ministry studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. In addition to founding PASCH (Peace and Safety in the Christian Home, in 2004, an evangelical organization formed to eliminate domestic abuse in Christian homes), she founded Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). Dr. Kroeger's compassionate activism against abuse of women is global and renowned.

Beyond Abuse is a superb collection of papers presented at past PASCH conferences by more than a dozen Christian men and women, written with the hope of informing, educating, and calling into action the faith community to support victims of domestic violence and abuse compassionately and to hold their abusers to accountability and help lead them on the road to healing and recovery.

Beyond Abuse is divided into three sections. The first, "Raising our Voices: Looking Back," includes dramatic personal stories of horrendous ongoing violent abuse within what was supposed to have been Christian marriage. Looking back, these Christians offer deep insight and help to anyone either living under such painful conditions or who sincerely desires to facilitate healing, restitution, and justice in the lives of God's children. This first section also includes two excellent informative essays written by noted Christian counselor, Dan Allender, and pastor, Al Miles, who share their personal experiences in counseling and pastoring dozens of victims of abuse, and offer encouragement and resources to help "the church face the extent of violence among us." The second section, "Raising Our Voices: Assessing the Contemporary Scene," includes seven essays explaining various supportive groups and programs for perpetrators, assessing just how effectively they are dealing with and healing the deeper issues that cause abuse, such as anger, poor self-esteem, and addictive behaviors. Section two also includes an insightful essay on forgiveness and the Christian community by Martha Thorson, a spiritual director, helping those who are working with victims of abuse to be sensitive to the devastating effects of the abuse on the victim, before attempting to move the victim in the direction of forgiveness. Forgiveness, the author notes, is at the heart of our Christian faith, but forgiveness should never be forced. Healing will flow by God's grace if we, as God's advocates, will encourage the abused to wait upon the Lord for his timing. The third and final section, "Raising our Voices: The Prophetic Call to Future Action," includes five essays explaining how the faith community can move forward actively in advocating for justice, restitution, oneness, and peace in the Christian home.

Because it has seventeen contributors with various educational and professional backgrounds and experiences, *Beyond Abuse* is a gem of a resource for pastors, counselors and Christian leaders. It looks at violence and abuse from many different facets (from the eyes of the abused, pastors, counselors, researchers, educators), offering an accurate and comprehensive analysis of abuse and invaluable insights in order to try to put an end to violence in the home and to inspire the faith community to cry out for change.

What is really an eye opener, especially for those Christian leaders and pastors who have a difficult time believing that abuse really occurs in the Christian home, is the first hand reports of the depth and breadth of the pain and suffering inflicted on God's daughters by their own spouses. It really does happen in the Christian home. Julie Owens courageously shares her tragic story of

life with a batterer, and how she desperately sought assistance from the Christian community only to be disillusioned with the lack of understanding and help in her time of need. She continued to reach out until she finally found support through a secular agency, and thus she began her long journey back to healing and wholeness. Her story is shared in order to help well-meaning pastors and Christian professionals to understand what a victim of abuse needs from her faith community. For example, she says that a pastor should never recommend marriage counseling to a woman who is in the midst of an abusive relationship. That may help much later in the process, but not while someone is undergoing severe abuse. What a woman needs then is a safe, caring haven to share an honest account of her present life, in order to find hope and strength to make the necessary decisions to end the abuse.

The thought provoking essay by Elizabeth Gerhardt, "Theological Reflections of the Prophetic Call," asks, "How does the church define abuse of women theologically? Does it define the problem as a moral and ethical one? Or does it address it as a confessional issue?" The author believes that it makes a difference the way the church views this important issue. She observes that "the prophetic call to end violence against women and children becomes more clearly defined when rooted in a confessional theology of the cross." Why does she say this? Because "a theology of the cross exposes the false Christian claims that suffering builds character and that women ought to bear their cross in silence." This is an excellent chapter. If taken to heart by church leaders, the advice would unify the church in its effort to do justice and to act kindly, in fighting this battle against abuse.

In summary, *Beyond Abuse* includes personal accounts of suffering due to violence and offers insight on how to care in the best way possible as one truly ministers to a victim, but it also includes powerful accounts and advice from counselors, pastors, educators, and theologians, all of which add to the resourcefulness of this book, making it one of the most comprehensive and valuable books that I have ever seen or read on this subject.

It is a sad reality that many clergy and Christian leaders shy away from this ugly topic of domestic abuse because they feel ill-equipped. Therefore, owning and reading a copy of this fine, well-balanced book with all of its excellent resources, ideas, and perspectives, will encourage them to honor God by honoring women—to raise their voices in harmony, to stop the violence and to bring healing to the troubled Christian home.

The Rev. Dr. Leslie Ann McKinney is Pastor of Community at Pilgrim Church, Beverly, MA and author of *Accepted in the Beloved: A Devotional Bible Study for Women on Finding Healing and Wholeness in God's Love* (Wipf and Stock, 2008).

Accepted in the Beloved

A Devotional Bible Study for Women on Finding Healing and Wholeness in God's Love

Leslie Ann McKinney

Are you struggling with fully accepting that God loves you?

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With an encouraging tone and transformative content, *Accepted in the Beloved* will help women find healing and wholeness in the love of the crucified Lord.

ISBN 13: 978-1-55635-936-1 / 56 pp. / paper

Leslie Ann McKinney serves as Pastor of Community at Pilgrim Church of Beverly, Massachusetts, a union church of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) and of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference. She specializes in women's ministry and is a spiritual director. She is a board member of Life Together International, a nonprofit ministry encouraging biblical justice, unity, and reconciliation.

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Review of *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* by Joshua A. Berman (New York, Oxford University Press, 2008)

Christine Cos

Paul's radical declaration in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all *one* in Christ Jesus" (emphasis mine), has been the rallying cry for Christians who decry hierarchy, whether it is due to gender, ethnic, or socioeconomic disparity. In his book *Created Equal*, author Joshua Berman endeavors to approach the Hebrew Bible, and the Pentateuch in particular, as a social and political document, thus arguing that the Pentateuch is the *earliest document* to break with the religious, political, and social constructs of the ancient Near East and prescribe an egalitarian polity for the people of God.

For Berman, the new order prescribed in the Pentateuch stands in stark contrast to the primary socioeconomic structure prevalent throughout the history of the Ancient Near East, namely "the divide between the *dominant tribute-imposing class* and the *dominated tribute-bearing class*" (4). The dominant tribute-imposing class is the political elite, encompassing nobility, military and religious leaders, merchants, and landowners—anyone who would benefit from state power. The dominant tribute-bearing class consists of the farmers, slaves, and unskilled workers whose surplus production was given to the tribute-imposing class through taxation, slave labor, rent, or debt service. Given the narrow scope of the book, Berman limits his analysis to socioeconomic politics; he acknowledges that the issues of gender and ethnicity are not addressed.

In his introduction, Berman lays out his methodology, whereby he will examine the text of the Pentateuch in its "received form." First, while acknowledging the wide acceptance of the source-critical method in biblical scholarship, Berman states that "the shape of these texts, as they have come to us, suggests that the Pentateuch was intended to be read as a whole and in order" (8). Where textual issues exist, the author refers to diachronic studies in his footnotes. By recognizing the inherent difficulties that arise from the source-critical method, literary analysis of the received text has helped to bridge the gap between traditional liberal scholarship and conservative scholarship. As a rabbi, the author recognizes that it is the received text that a congregation is interacting with daily, not "sources."

Subsequently, Berman chooses to take a *synchronic approach* by analyzing the text of the Pentateuch against ancient Near East parallels. Because the author accepts the conclusions of the source-critical approach, namely a late date for the final editing of the Pentateuch, from his point of view the biblical texts are a reworking of older material from the ancient Near East that puts forth a "new social and theological agenda" (9).

Thus using the synchronic approach, Berman argues that the rejection of hierarchy seen in the text of the Pentateuch illustrates a major theological shift compared to the surrounding social and religious milieu of the ancient Near East. According to Paul Ricoeur's "logic of correspondences," the social and economic hierarchy of the ancient Near East was an analog of, and thus legitimized by, the corresponding heavenly hierarchy, as presented in epics such as the Mesopotamian creation epic of Atrahasis. Berman employs Peter Berger's "hermeneutic of suspicion"—in which a religious system is a tool used to "[mask] the human construction and exercise of power" (17).

In chapter 1, Berman demonstrates that the covenant paradigm of the ancient Near East is the foundation for the egalitarian order put forth in the text of the Pentateuch. By comparing the "political thought" of the Bible with the social and political orders of the surrounding nations of Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Egypt, using parallel texts, Berman argues that the theology of the Hebrew Bible elevated the position of the common person through the concept of a covenant

relationship with God, which portrayed all Israel as the subordinate king (48). The metaphysical legitimization of the monarchy and social hierarchy in the surrounding nations is not present in the text of the Pentateuch. Subsequently, in chapter 2, Berman concludes that more specifically the text of Deuteronomy lays out a "collective power structure" by putting a system of checks and balances, if you will, on both the power of the Israelite monarchy as well as the kinship relationship, whereby "the institutions of authority share a common origin, and are of equal provenance, status, and privilege, because all are created by the law [of God], and accountable to it" (78).

Next, in chapter 3, the author compares the Deuteronomic laws concerning wealth and assets to those common in the ancient Near East. Debt-slavery was a permanent feature of the socio-economic environment of Mesopotamia and the surrounding area. However, the God of the Pentateuch is portrayed as a "liberator of slaves," therefore, no Israelite can lay claim to an elevated status. Thus, the law code in the Book of Deuteronomy takes pains to curb the debt-slavery that resulted from economic insolvency. Berman traces the "natural economic order of the insolvency cycle" (88) and how the text of Deuteronomy limits the accumulation of land through insolvency and debt-slavery. Berman concludes that these laws curbed the establishment of a wealthy elite class and provided for the operation of a free marketplace (108).

In chapter 4, Berman goes on to show how the development of an alphabetic script, a pre-modern communication technology breakthrough, helped to advance literacy beyond the royal/scribal classes. He states that "at the time that Isaiah and later Jeremiah were writing down their sermons for dissemination and the Book of Deuteronomy was calling for Israelites to convene every seven years for a mass reading of the law, Greece was still preliterate, and very few Greeks ever had contact with a text" (130). Berman argues that, during the Classical Greek period, writing was considered inferior to the spoken word of the orator. In contrast, the Pentateuch's view of society required that the communication of texts and their messages become the key tool for exposing the Israelites to the "written" word of God (133).

In the last chapter, Berman compares and contrasts the Legend of Sargon (a Neo-Assyrian text ca. 7th century BC, believed to recount the birth and rescue of the great Sargon of Akkad) with the "Rescue of Moses" narrative from Exodus 2:1-10, noting their narrative similarities as hero tales (146). The Legend of Sargon is written in the first person, likely to garner acceptance and legitimacy of divine authority to rule, which was common in the ancient Near East and served to propagate the nation's "royal theology" and analogous hierarchy.

In contrast, the account of Moses' rescue is told in the third person. "[The] Bible serves to articulate the subtleties of the demands of covenantal behavior…Biblical narrative essentially sets forward a series of situations and scenarios that allows the reader or listener to fully empathize with the characters and, as it were, endure the experience, the challenges, and the dilemmas together with the protagonists" (148). To Berman's point, the narrative of Moses presents a human figure whose lineage and upbringing are "beyond hierarchy" (166). Moses, the prince of Egypt, casts aside his royal position to ally himself with his "slave-kin" so that they can become "equal citizens under the sovereignty of the King of Kings" (166).

Throughout the book, Berman uses illustrations from the modern period as comparative learning devices, much like sermon illustrations. For example, he compares the constitutional principles in the Book of Deuteronomy with those of Montesquieu, who was a proponent of hereditary nobility and rule, thus putting the radical ideas of collective power in the Bible in even sharper contrast (79). Later on in the book, Berman uses Renaissance art as *exegetical pictures* that flesh out textual and sub-textual questions about the rescue of Moses (Exod 2:1-10) something most commentaries do not address (159).

Taking Berman's assumptions about the dating of the Pentateuch into account, we note his analysis of the biblical text versus parallel ancient Near Eastern texts yields tremendous insight into

the radical uniqueness of the Bible. However, imagine the impact of his conclusions when viewed through the lens of biblical inspiration and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

First, when Mosaic authorship is maintained, then the synchronic analysis of the biblical text becomes an "apples-to-apples" comparison. The ancient Near Eastern texts are no longer the precursors of the biblical text, but its *contemporaries*. The result is that the text of the Pentateuch illustrates a more dramatic break from the social and political norms of its surrounding neighbors by virtue of the fact that it occurs at a much earlier time in history, thus highlighting the imperative "you shall not follow the laws (*huqqōth*) of the nations that I am driving out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them" (Lev 20:23). The Proto-Canaanite script (ca. 1400 BC) grew out of Egyptian hieroglyphs, making the written form of the Pentateuch texts possible at an earlier date.

When biblical inspiration is taken into account along with early Mosaic authorship of the text, then the received text of the Pentateuch, especially Deuteronomy, is not the work of a defeated and exiled Israel, whether it be on purpose or accidental, but the design and Word of God, who envisioned an egalitarian society from the beginning (Gen 1:26-28; 2:18).

In *Created Equal*, Berman is able to articulate an egalitarian ideal from within the text of the Pentateuch. Those who look to the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament for justification of a more just and egalitarian society can now go further back in biblical history to make their case because its foundation rests firmly upon the inspired text of the Pentateuch.

The author is adept at explaining complex issues in an engaging way, making this book very readable. While not designed to be used as a textbook, per se, *Created Equal* is an excellent text for courses on Social Justice and should be added to the *Suggested Reading* lists of any course taught on the Pentateuch. Berman's synchronic approach to reading the Pentateuch is highly promoted by Gordon-Conwell instructors in Old Testament.

In the conclusion to his book, Berman expresses his hope of opening up new areas of comparative study that would ultimately trace the history of the "idea of equality," calling specifically for analyses of the Greek idea of equality, the early Christian notions of equality, and finally the concepts of equality that fueled the great political thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (168).

Joshua A. Berman was raised in New York City and attended Princeton University as an undergraduate, receiving his B.A. in Religion. After immigrating to Israel in 1987, he was ordained as an orthodox rabbi, and pursued doctoral studies in Bible at Bar-Ilan University. He lectures in Bible at Bar-Ilan University and at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem.

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Review of *Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture* by Adam S. McHugh (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 2009)

John Lathrop

In the New Testament, we find that from time to time the apostolic writers addressed various segments of the church. For example, we find the apostles Paul and Peter addressed such groups as wives, husbands, children, slaves, and masters (Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1: 1 Pet 3:1–7). This practice of addressing various segments of the church has been carried on in subsequent church history by non-canonical writers as well. Visit a local Christian bookstore or browse through a Christian book catalog and you will find titles addressed to men, women, husbands, wives, teenagers, the white church, and the African-American church, to name a few.

In this, his first book, Presbyterian pastor Adam McHugh addresses a subgroup in the church, but not one that is immediately recognizable. This group cannot be identified by the obvious outward differences of gender, age, or race but rather by their temperament. *Introverts in the Church* examines the more reserved members of the body of Christ who are frequently misunderstood. The author, who is himself an introvert, writes about the strengths and weaknesses of introverts and the contributions that they can make to the Christian community. McHugh writes about the inner life of introverts, their relationships, how they lead, and how they do evangelism. The book affirms the value of introverts in the church.

The author believes that the Christian community, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is biased toward extroverts (12). He says that the evangelical church, because of some of its ideas and practices regarding community and evangelism, communicates the idea that God is most pleased with extroverts (13). McHugh cites one interesting study done at a Christian college which may, in part, explain why the church values extroverts. Students at the college were tested to determine if they were introverts or extroverts. Fifty–four percent of the students were determined to be introverts. When the students were asked whether Jesus was an introvert or an extrovert, 97 percent of all the students in the survey (introverts and extroverts together) said they believed that Jesus was an extrovert (15). McHugh says that, if Jesus is seen as an extrovert, then there is now a theological component to the idea that the extroverted temperament is superior (16).

In the course of his description and defense of introverts the author draws from the experiences of people in church history, his own life, the experience of friends, and from sociological and psychological research. One area that he covers is the inner life of the introvert. McHugh tells us that the introvert draws strength from solitude, that is, an introvert is energized by being alone (35). The introvert's need for periods of time alone can cause others to see them as antisocial (36). Introverts are also given to internally processing information before speaking (37–38). This causes some extroverts to want to finish their sentences for them (38). In addition, introverts also prefer depth over breadth, that is, they prefer to have fewer interests and fewer, but closer, friends (41).

McHugh also supplies scriptural evidence that there were people with introverted qualities in the Bible. For example, introverted traits can be found in Jacob, who was "a quiet man" (Gen 25:27), Moses, who was "slow of speech" (Exod 4:10), Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was reflective (Luke 2:51), and Timothy, who was timid or fearful (2 Tim 1:7). While McHugh admits that we do not have enough material to determine the temperament of most biblical characters, the Bible does demonstrate that God used people of all different personality types (47).

The author says that, because being an extrovert is so highly valued in our world, a lot of introverts have been hurt and are in need of healing (48–49). He says that this healing can take place as people accept that they are introverts, come to know God more deeply, and discover the

purpose and destiny that God has given them, as they journey outward into community (54–55, 59). The last item in the list is crucial because McHugh says that introverts can be very preoccupied with themselves and they really require community in order to get the healing that they need (59, 61).

The author gives all of chapter 5 to discussing the challenges and necessity of community for introverts. He also writes about gifts that introverts bring to the community, gifts that include insight, giving people space, and creativity (97–101). Because getting involved in community is often a challenge for introverts, McHugh offers some practical counsel to help them. His counsel includes making friends in high places, that is befriending people who are well connected in the community, playing a role in the community, joining a group, socializing with a purpose, revealing their inner processes, being available to people, asking questions, learning to over-express themselves, and looking for people who initiate relationships with them (102–106).

Two chapters are given to the subject of leadership. In chapter 6, McHugh affirms that introverts can lead and gives his readers some examples of leaders who were introverts. The leaders that he lists are Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jonathan Edwards (129–134). Chapter 7 is given to fleshing out what introverted leadership looks like and how it can be implemented; there is also a section on how to lead different types of people, specifically introverts and extroverts.

Chapter 8 discusses the subject of introverts and evangelism. Sharing their faith can be difficult for introverts because they tend to be less outgoing than extroverts. Rather than taking the traditional evangelical approach, which is a direct proclamation of the facts of the gospel, McHugh suggests taking the less direct approach of exploring mystery together with people (172). He also offers some practical tips that may help introverts be more effective in sharing their Christian faith (183–184).

Chapter 9 counsels churches to be aware that there are introverts in their midst. They are called to consider the effects that their methods of doing church have upon introverts.

I enjoyed this book immensely and think that it is a very valuable resource. It could be helpful to introverts as it provides them with a greater understanding of themselves. I know it helped me. The book may also encourage introverts by letting them know that they are not "weird" and that they do have valuable gifts to offer to the church. This book could also be useful to extroverts. In its pages, extroverts can gain a greater understanding of their quieter brothers and sisters in Christ. This book would be of benefit to people already engaged in ministry as well as those studying for it. This text could be incorporated into a counseling course, a course on personality, or Mentored Ministry courses. I highly recommend it.

John P. Lathrop is a 2003 graduate of CUME (MA in Urban Ministry). He is an ordained minister with the International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies. He has written for *Vista Magazine* (the official publication of the International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies), the *Pneuma Review* (a publication of the Pneuma Foundation) and the Christians for Biblical Equality journal, the *Priscilla Papers*. He contributed two chapters to the book *The Foundations of Faith* (Pleasant Word, 2007) and is the author of two books, *Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers Then and Now* (Xulon, 2008) and *The Power and Practice of the Church: God, Discipleship, and Ministry* (J. Timothy King, 2010).

The Power and Practice of the Church: God, Discipleship, and Ministry

These are three of the major themes in the Bible. This book is a collection of 18 articles, which cover a number of different subjects, but basically center on these three themes: God, discipleship, and ministry, or to put it another way, the Lord's relationship with us and our relationships with one another.
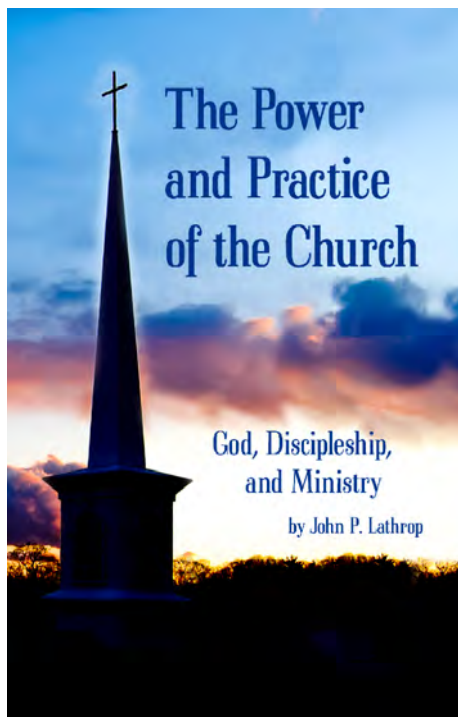
The Power and Practice of the Church reflects John Lathrop's manifest skill as a teacher of the Word. The articles are both thought-provoking and inspiring. He writes from a Pentecostal perspective, but is intellectually honest regarding myths common within Pentecostalism. He opens the scriptures to us as an experienced pastor, well-read and educated, addressing significant and sometimes controversial issues within the church, including the gifts of tongues and prophesy, divine guidance, spiritual conceit, women in church leadership, collecting offerings, and Jesus as a model for the church's public ministry.

John Lathrop is a 2003 graduate of CUME (M.A. in Urban Ministry), and is an ordained minister with the International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies. He has written for *Vista Magazine* (the official publication of the International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies), the *Pneuma Review* (a publication of the Pneuma Foundation), and the Christians for Biblical Equality journal, the *Priscilla Papers*. He contributed to the book *The Foundations of Faith* and authored *Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers, Then and Now*.

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Review of *Contending with Christianity's Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors* edited by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009)

ROYCE GORDON GRUENLER

The preface discloses that this volume of essays by prominent evangelical philosophers and NT scholars is written in the context of annual apologetics conferences at local churches in different regions of the country which are being well received by large numbers of lay participants eager to learn how to defend the gospel winsomely and wisely. The book stretches one's reasoning powers with challenging rational and historical arguments for the truth of Christianity and offers a healthy balance to current approaches that are more subjective and feeling-centered. All the chapters are written with appreciation of the intellectual ability God has given human beings to think rationally about the nature of reality and the historical grounds of salvation. The book is arranged in three parts, the first containing six essays on the existence of God centers mainly on logical problems in modern atheism and evolutionary naturalism. The six articles in part two consider the Jesus of history and the logical and evidential weaknesses of contemporary critical schools that attempt to undermine the historical foundation of the Gospels' authenticity. Part three consists of six additional chapters devoted to the coherence of Christian doctrine.

Overall, the book succeeds in presenting conservative Christian scholarship as reasonable and fair-minded, in contrast to the tone of many contemporary critics whose arguments seem to be more emotional than logical and evidential. The editors are members of the Evangelical Philosophical Society and are to be commended for applying the intellectual rigor of rational Christian thought to anti-Christian views in our day. Especially in view are the new atheist popularizers Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens, whose arguments are deemed to lack good logical and scientific evidence against the claims of Christianity, and Bart Ehrman, John Dominic Crossan, cofounder of the Jesus Seminar, and other revisionist critics of the canonical Gospels who prefer the authority of extracanonical Gnostic texts in an attempt to discredit the claims of the historical Jesus. The apologetical approach employed in the articles, though not made explicit, is mainly rationalistic and evidentialist, in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and typical of the late Gordon H. Clark. Also assumed is the presuppositional approach of Cornelius Van Til and the Augustinian "faith seeking understanding" epistemology of Michael Polanyi, both of whom emphasized the personal, if often tacit, assumptions that are present in the human use of logic and historical evidence to bolster prior ideologies. Van Til would say that, in the end, all non-Christian "reasoning" is irrational because it ends with an ultimately inexplicable and irrational universe. The method of the book is to expose the irrational reasoning of modern skepticism and naturalism. It also appears to have as its goal the conversion of non-believers, not simply getting the better of their arguments; hence, the heart of Christian apologetics, as the authors see it, is evangelism. This may well account for the design and appeal of the seminars for lay people across the country.

William Lane Craig, in his brief opening chapter, confronts the illogic of Richard Dawkins' attack on the Christian argument for design in the universe and his dismissal of God. Dawkins believes a divine mind, if there were one, would have to be simple, while the universe is complex, therefore God could not be its designer. This assumption Craig dismisses as confusing the simplicity of God's mind with God's ideas. As for Dawkin's question Who designed the designer? Craig cogently observes that, if infinite regress of explanations were required to explain every explanation, nothing could ever be explained and science itself would be impossible. Victor Reppert observes in his critique of naturalism that the advance of science will make the case harder for the naturalist, as more extensive correlations between physical and mental states are brought to light, as has been

x

the case in recent years. Mark D. Linville advances a fundamental moral argument regarding the metaphysical underpinnings of naturalism, challenging evolutionary naturalists to produce warrants and logical justification for the truth of their beliefs in a universe that, for them, does not allow absolute truth statements. There is, in other words, a deep irrationality in naturalism and atheism that undermines their claims to truth.

As for the Gospels and the Jesus of history, Robert H. Stein points out the circularity of skeptical criticism, whereby the case against the Gospels is already predetermined when it is assumed that the universe is closed against the possibility of miracles, a presupposition that goes back to Kant and his category of causality, which dogmatically asserts that every historical event has a natural cause and explanation. Gary R. Habermas, in a lucid and well documented essay, gives evidence of early apostolic proclamations of Jesus' resurrection, thereby affirming our confidence in the historicity of the Gospels. Craig A. Evans and Daniel B. Wallace expose the tendency of recent critical scholarship to late-date the Gospels and early-date the later extracononical Gospels in order to fabricate a different Jesus more amenable to modern tastes. Evans' article, a little masterpiece of scholarly acumen in its criticism of skeptics like Koester and Crossan, ends by describing current fabrications in the name of NT scholarship as "frankly embarrassing," and at their worst "irresponsible pseudoscholarship." Wallace is not much kinder in his evaluation of Bart Ehrman's radical textual critical claims in *Misquoting Jesus*, noting that there have not been any significant textual variants that have come to light which would affect basic Christian beliefs. The section rounds off with a well-written and positive overview by Michael J. Williams as to where we are in conservative scholarship concerning Jesus' self-understanding and the overall reliability of the Gospels. These conservative scholars, representing many others in the academy, make a strong case for the Jesus of history and the Gospels, while orthodox Christian philosophers in their discipline have debated with better logic and interpretation of scientific evidence.

In Part 3, "The Coherence of Christian Doctrine," contributors carry on the debate in a manner reminiscent of Edward John Carnell and the school of systematic-consistency, in which the apologist attempts to demonstrate that biblical-classical Christianity is more internally and logically consistent, and more systematically explains the meaning of existence in our universe, than opposing views. In the opening essay, which is broad in its scope, Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty offer an invitation to move beyond general theism to include God's Triune nature and the incarnation. The believer has a flexibility not limited to logical exercises alone and is open to a variety of religious experiences that are not available to one who does not share the Christian world-view. The chapter concludes that theoretical arguments for the coherence of God against the new naturalism and atheism are only a beginning, and that the next step is actually encountering God's existence with humility and in anticipation of unimaginable spiritual experiences of profundity and richness. Paul Copan, principal editor of the book, follows with a splendid study of the Trinity, God as Three and One, which is Christianity's contribution to a final resolution of the ancient problem of the one and the many in religious and philosophical thought. If Heraclitus emphasized flux without unity, Parmenides focused on unity and denied plurality. But, says Copan, we live not in a multiverse but in a universe, in the unity of the three-in-one God who creates and holds all things together and gives us the ability to account for both unity and plurality in our experience. A bit of comic relief with serious intent is offered by Steve L. Porter who cleverly contrasts Dostoyevsky's view of punishment as good for society with Woody Allen's opinion in the film *Crimes and Misdemeanors,* that punishment is not a fitting consequence of crime but an obstacle to be avoided. Porter points out that penal substitution is at the core of our moral framework and is the best explanation for Christ's dying on behalf of human sinners. This leads to the right valuing of the Godhead, in contrast to modern devaluing of God's being, nature, and purpose. In other words, God counts, in more ways than one.

Is this a book to buy? Yes, if the reader will spend the time to reflect on its riches slowly. At the very least, check out the book from the library and read selectively, and then remember that lay people are feasting on these ideas at seminars throughout the country. We "professionals" ought to be as well informed as they on matters profoundly philosophical and theological.

Royce Gordon Gruenler is Professor of New Testament Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.
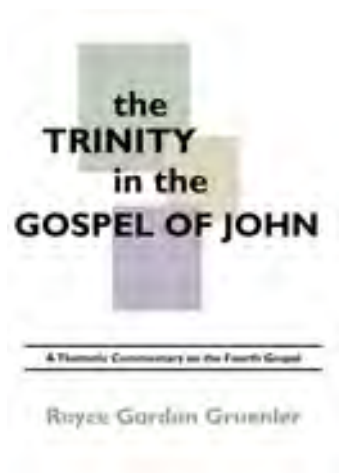
THE TRINITY IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
A Thematic Commentary on the Fourth Gospel
By Royce G. Gruenler

No book in the Bible says more about the Trinity than the Gospel of John. Of the innumerable commentaries published on this much loved Gospel, few have focused on this central theme.

"I have tried," writes the author, "to listen to the discourses of Jesus in John and draw forth the disclosures of God's social nature in the activity of the incarnate Son." He discovers "something quite remarkable about the attitude of the persons of the Triune Community," something he calls "disposability." Father, Son, and Spirit are "there for the other, ...servants who place themselves at the other person's disposal in an act of total generosity." They serve not only each other but also the fallen human race, and the creatures they redeem "are invited to wash one another's feet as servants to the world."

Devoted Bible students will find in this thematic commentary a dimension to the Gospel of John they may have noticed only vaguely. As they follow the author through this Gospel chapter by chapter, they will acquire a far deeper understanding of the Triune God, whom they serve because he has served them.

This book is currently available from Wipf & Stock Publishers
http://wipfandstock.com

Review of *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How it Died*, by Philip Jenkins (New York: Harper Collins, 2008)

Benjamin B. DeVan

With a title like *The Lost History of Christianity*, one might expect a belated *Da Vinci Code* knockoff or a half-hearted attempt to revive the publishing frenzy piggybacking on Dan Brown's pseudo-historical romp. But instead of fictional conspiracies pretending Jesus settled in France, Philip Jenkins reveals a compelling, lesser known, real-life drama of ancient Christianity in Africa, Asia, the Middle-East…and its apparent demise.

Jenkins, an esteemed chronicler of global or "World" Christianity, is the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of the Humanities at Pennsylvania State University. His books include *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, 2002; Revised and Expanded, 2006), *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford, 2006, 2008), *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford, 2007) and *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 years* (2010). *Jesus Wars* is a prequel of sorts to *The Lost History of Christianity*. Both are significant, but *The Lost History of Christianity* plows more fallow ground. Chapter one commences soberly:

> Religions die…some religions vanish altogether, while others are reduced from great world faiths to a handful of adherents…For a thousand years, India was mainly Buddhist…Once Persia was Zoroastrian; most of Spain, Muslim. It is not difficult to find countries or even continents, once viewed as natural homelands of a particular faith, where that creed is now extinct, and such disasters are not confined to primal or 'primitive' beliefs…Christianity too, has on several occasions been destroyed in regions where it once flourished…Repeatedly through its history, the church's tree has been pruned and cut back, often savagely (1-3).

Countering the myth that European colonizers introduced Christianity to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, Jenkins documents how Christianity preceded Islam in these regions. As late as the eleventh century, "Asia was still home to at least a third of the world's Christians, and perhaps a tenth of all Christians still lived in Africa—a figure that the continent would not reach again until the 1960s" (4). Likewise, Patriarch Timothy of Mesopotamia in the eighth and ninth centuries was "much more influential" than the pope in Rome, "and on a par with the Orthodox patriarch in Constantinople. Perhaps a quarter of the world's Christians looked to Timothy as both spiritual and political head" (6). In short, "common mental maps of Christian history omit a thousand years of that story, and several million square miles of territory…we can't understand Christian history without Asia—or indeed, Asian history without Christianity" (11).

Jenkins surveys ancient vigorous churches born not in Athens, Ireland, or Rome; but in Armenia, China, Edessa, Egypt, Ethiopia [Abyssinia], Georgia, India, Iran, Nubia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tibet, Tripoli, Turkey, Turkestan, and Yemen. Rather than conforming to Latin liturgy like Roman Catholicism did, these churches utilized indigenous languages, art, literary forms, and interacted with other religions such as Buddhism. They contributed to the "Arabic golden age" by bringing science, philosophy and medicine to the Arab world. Patriarch Timothy translated Aristotle's *Topics* into Arabic from Syriac, and Syriac Christians made first reference to the Indian numbering system that is today known as Arabic. "Europeans derived much of their scholarship from the Arab world; yet in the early centuries, this cultural achievement was usually Christian

and Jewish rather than Muslim" (18). Yet despite such historic impact:

> This older Christian world perished, destroyed so comprehensively that its memory is forgotten by all except academic specialists. During the Middle Ages, and especially during the fourteenth century, church hierarchies were destroyed, priests and monks were killed, enslaved, or expelled, and monasteries and cathedrals fell silent. As church institutions fell, so Christian communities shrank, the result of persecution or ethnic and religious cleansing. Survivors found it all but impossible to practice their faith without priests or churches, especially when rival religions offered such powerful attractions (23).

How did this happen? Jenkins asserts churches "collapsed or vanished because they were unable to cope with the pressures placed upon them by hostile regimes, mainly Muslim…some egregious examples of church extinction were perpetrated by other faiths, by Buddhists or followers of Shinto, or by Christians themselves" (30).

Sometimes the death of Christian communities involved centuries-long decline. Violence and large-scale immigration produced environments where "being Muslim was natural…the social and cultural mainstream…being a Christian or Jew consigned one to the status of a despised outsider" (214). State persecution, systematic discrimination, second-class status for Jews and Christians, population transfer, scapegoating, and heavy taxation of religious minorities coalesced, relentlessly tempting Christians to compromise or convert to Islam.

As Christians became a reviled impoverished class, their resources for ministering to the poor and downtrodden dwindled. By plundering Jewish and Christian populations, Muslim elites established a monopoly on dispensing benevolence—a technique despots frequently employ. Christians were demoralized by their inability to provide material help for the hurting, whereas Muslims, if they wished to, could more easily supply assistance to desperate indigents who then commonly or subsequently aligned with Islam.

Jenkins writes that recurrent and intense persecution functioned as a "ratchet effect" (211), so that minority Jewish and Christian communities were persistently diminished via death and attrition. Muslims interweaved vicious campaigns of harassment with fragile interludes of peace during which Christians or Jews were not allowed to rebuild or restore damaged or destroyed houses of worship, or to openly seek converts to Judaism and Christianity. This ensured a continually decreasing Jewish and Christian public presence, along with shrinking numbers of resolute Jews and Christians who refused to convert to Islam, "Rare indeed is the religion that can withstand a full thousand years of extreme maltreatment" (209-210).

Although conversion to Islam was intermittently blocked by ruling Muslim elites who desired a minimal population of Jews and Christians to tax, "self-evidently, Islam represented growth, expansion and success, in contrast to the tattered shreds of Christianity" (225). As the ratchet turned another notch, "the eventual result was to create a Muslim world that was just as Christian-free as large sections of Europe would be Jew-free after the Second World War" (141).

Jenkins purports that the extent to which Christian communities survived depended on how deeply Christianity's roots were planted in local and national cultures. Christianity that limited itself to a single ethnic group, class, central location, or language was likely to die more quickly. Geographically and otherwise diversified churches were more likely to persevere.

Jenkins also explores the delicate balance Christians treaded between challenging and accommodating non-Christian powers. Refusing any accommodation meant "accepting utter marginality…from any participation in a thriving society" (245). Another attempt to cope was a "Christianity" which rendered itself indistinct from the broader culture. Whereas, "too little adaptation means irrelevance; too much leads to assimilation and, often, disappearance" (245).

In his final chapter, Jenkins challenges Christians to formulate a "theology of extinction" (249). Why does God allow Christian flourishing in certain contexts, while in other contexts churches shrivel and disappear? Why does persecution regularly achieve its desired goals? If God intends Christians to carry Jesus' message to the ends of the earth, why do carriers die before they deliver it? If the blood of martyrs is the seed of conversion as Tertullian averred, why is precious seed scattered on stony ground?

On the other hand, what kind of God grants victory only to the most theologically correct or authentic worshipers? Such a God of "brute strength" might better resemble coercive Greek, Roman, and pagan deities than the "complex God of history presented by later faiths" (257).

Jenkins concludes that long-term catastrophes may appear impossible to reverse, but so long as Christianity thrives anywhere, it may return to regions where it once prospered. In the twentieth century, the number and percentage of Christians in Africa multiplied exponentially, and memories of ancient Christianity in decimated areas can serve as historical precedents for fresh beginnings: "We need to recover those memories, to restore that history. To borrow the title of one of Charles Olson's great poems: the chain of memory is resurrection" (262).

The Lost History of Christianity is a *tour de force*, but it is not without its problems. For instance, Jenkins fervently disavows *The Lost History of Christianity* is a "lament for a worldwide Christian hegemony that never was, still less for a failure to resist rival religions such as Islam" (3). The reader is urged instead to "regret the destruction of a once flourishing culture, much as we mourn the passing of Muslim Spain, Buddhist India, or the Jewish worlds of Eastern Europe" (3-4).

"Regret" may be poignant, and the word "hegemony" raises all sorts of issues, but why should a Christian like Jenkins not lament the devastation perpetrated against Christianity, or the failure of Christians to resist imperialist Islam—a failure that lead to colossal suffering and even annihilation? In contrast, one easily finds Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, or other scholarship lamenting atrocities or excesses of crusades, colonialism, conquistadors, and so forth.

For whatever reasons, Jenkins feels obligated to renounce "lament," his renunciation smacks of politically correct pandering to a "spirit of the age" favoring non-Christian religions over Christianity, a double standard Jenkins himself decries (184). Contemporary critics of colonialism and Christendom are legion, but far fewer critique Islamic imperialism: "Reading sympathetic accounts of the spread of Islam, we can forget that this was a movement of armed conquest and imperial expansion, which on occasion involved ferocious violence" (101).

Second, Jenkins avows, "Nothing in Muslim scriptures makes the faith of Islam any more or less likely to engage in persecution or forcible conversion than any other world religion" (31). But Jenkins does not explain how, why, or by what standard this is true. Christian skeptics could charge that, if the New Testament (which is about the same length as the *Qur'an*) is the final scriptural authority for Christianity, and the *Qur'an* illuminated by the life of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad is the final scriptural authority for Islam, the variation in raw material available for interpretation and application from within these sources is substantial.

For example, interpreters of the *Qur'an* must contend with numerous exhortations for hostility against non-Muslims, like Surah 9 (Yusuf Ali translation) which directs Muslims, "But when the forbidden months are past, fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, an [sic] seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is oft forgiving, most merciful" (9:5) and, "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book [Jews, Christians] until they pay the Jizyah [religious tax] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (9:29).

For Muslims, the relationship between Surah 9 and more tolerant Surahs such as 2:256, "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things" (cf. 109:1-6) is complicated by general Muslim consensus that Surah 9 is the final Surah God revealed. This does not mean that Muslims must interpret Surah 9 and similar passages as universal and timeless rather than time-bound or situational, but while the Old Testament contains violent exhortations in strict circumstances against specific groups [as opposed to potentially open-ended war with unbelievers in Surah 9], neither Jesus nor the New Testament authors command anything resembling, "If they don't believe in me, kill them!"

Some Muslim activists quote Jesus referring to "swords" in Matthew 10:34 and Luke 22 as calls to violence, but Matthew 10:34 uses "sword" metaphorically; and, in Luke 22, Jesus rebukes Peter for cutting off someone's ear with a sword, then heals the person Peter cut. The Apostle Paul in Romans 13 additionally notes that civil authorities "bear the sword" [that is, the threat of criminal punishment] so that citizens will refrain from wrongdoing. But this is a far cry from direct decrees to kill or subdue nonbelievers because of their unbelief.

Third, the degree to which Ancient Christianity "died" in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East remains unclear, even though Christianity's ancient "Golden Age" and public visible presence faded, at least temporarily. Jenkins acknowledges biblical and historic precedents for a "righteous remnant" (250) as well as hidden, secret, or "crypto-Christians" (36-37, 175-178, 203). For example, "Between the tenth century and the thirteenth, Christianity has no recorded history in China, which does not mean it did not maintain a subterranean existence" (66).

More recently, the World Christian Database documenting global demography indicates that eight to nine percent of the total current Chinese population is Christian. This would have shocked mid-to-late twentieth century demographers who perceived indigenous Chinese Christianity to be dead. There is also the issue of communities or individuals who identify as Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu, but whose practices and doctrines correspond in whole or in part with Christianity. Does a Christian "rose by any other name smell as sweet" (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2:2)? Does Christianity endure if its teachings continue to influence ostensible non-Christians?

If Jenkins' account is essentially accurate, implications abound for Christian mission, inter-religious cooperation, indigenization of Christianity in local cultures, and public policy. For instance, civil regulations and attitudes governing religious freedom matter immensely.

Some people would like to reduce the gospel to a merely individual affair, but a Christianity that actively shares its "salt and light" (Matthew 5) concurrently critiques, cooperates with, and seeks to redeem the cultures it enlivens, thus reverberating more fully in depth and in scope at the individual, societal, and global levels. It is difficult for Christianity to resonate in this way, simply operating in "survival" mode. Even when Christianity endured severe persecution by Roman and other authorities, it multiplied as a missionary faith. The New Testament does not seem to permit, let alone encourage, circling the Christian wagons or hunkering down in religiously differentiated ghettos.

When oppressive structures successfully hamper Christian opportunities to perform good works and proclaim the Gospel, the kingdom of God retreats in that the starving go hungry, the naked go unclothed, and the proclamation of deliverance to the captives is muted, if not silenced. One easily detects these symptoms throughout the "Muslim World" and secular tyrannies today.

Loving enemies and praying for persecutors can—indeed must—include awareness of and creative opposition to religious and secular oppression and its consequences for present and future generations. Jenkins quotes Saint Vincent, "Jesus promised that his church would last until the end of time, but that he never mentioned the words, *in Europe*" (41). Discerning readers can readily add, "*or in Africa, Asia, Australia, Latin America, or the United States.*"

The Lost History of Christianity is both a fascinating historical narrative and a prophetic warning to complacent churches and Christians who believe their faith is unassailable. At the same time, it calls Christians to eschew despair, to assist persecuted brothers and sisters, to learn from their predecessors' trials and triumphs, and to hope in the Lord of new life and resurrection.

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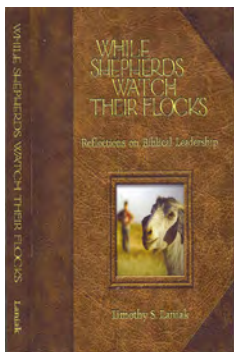
While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks: Reflections on Biblical Leadership brings to life the realities and rewards of leadership by looking at the ancient image of shepherds. It offers an opportunity to think biblically about one's calling to serve Jesus Christ, the expectations that come with being a shepherd leader, and the compassionate and courageous commitment needed to provide for, protect, and guide those under our care. "With a shepherd's heart and a scholar's mind, Laniak goes beyond Phillip Keller's devotional classic, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, and raises our job description to a divine standard" (Dr. Haddon W. Robinson).

Dr. Timothy S. Laniak serves as the Dean and Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte.
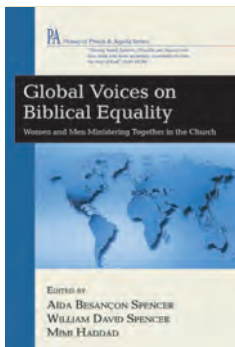
Global Voices on Biblical Equality is a fresh look at the contextualizing of gender equality throughout the world. Biblical equality is a burgeoning, global reform movement led by scholars and leaders not only in North America but also on every continental landmass in the world. What inroads is biblical equality making around the globe? What is its appeal? What still needs reform? How is biblical equality transforming each culture? In this book, female and male writers who are ethnically part of every continent explore the contextual challenges, successes, and adaptations of engaging the biblical text on gender and ministry.

The editors of this volume are Aída Besançon Spencer, William David Spencer, and Mimi Haddad. Other contributors include CUME graduates Darin Vincent Poullard and Eliana Marques Runyon, and GCTS Hamilton graduates Matthew D. Kim, Sandra Gatlin Whitley, Awilda Gonzalez-Tejera, Beulah Wood, and others.